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Colin White

SIX PLAYS

SIX PLAYS

THE GREEN PASTURES
MARC CONNELLY

STREET SCENE
ELMER RICE

BADGER'S GREEN
R. C. SHERRIFF

DOWN OUR STREET
ERNEST GEORGE

SOCRATES
CLIFFORD BAX

ALISON'S HOUSE
SUSAN GLASPELL

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THE GREEN PASTURES

THE GREEN PASTURES

A FABLE

SUGGESTED BY ROARK BRADFORD'S SOUTHERN SKETCHES, "OL' MAN ADAM AN' HIS CHILLUN"

by

MARC CONNELLY

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To MY MOTHER

CHARACTERS

MR. DESHEE, THE PREACHER
MYRTLE
FIRST BOY
SECOND BOY
FIRST COOK
A VOICE
SECOND COOK
FIRST MAN ANGEL
FIRST MAMMY ANGEL
A STOUT ANGEL
A SLENDER ANGEL
ARCHANGEL
GABRIEL
GOD
CHOIR LEADER
CUSTARD MAKER
ADAM
EVE
CAIN
CAIN'S GIRL
ZEBA
CAIN THE SIXTH
BOY GAMBLER
GENERAL
HEAD MAGICIAN
FIRST WIZARD
SECOND WIZARD
JOSHUA
FIRST SCOUT
FIRST GAMBLER
SECOND GAMBLER
VOICE IN SHANTY
NOAH
NOAH'S WIFE
SHEM
FIRST WOMAN
SECOND WOMAN
THIRD WOMAN
FIRST MAN
FLATFOOT
HAM
JAPHETH
FIRST CLEANER
SECOND CLEANER
ABRAHAM
ISAAC
JACOB
MOSES
ZIPPORAH
AARON
A CANDIDATE
MAGICIAN
PHARAOH
KING OF BABYLON
PROPHET
HIGH PRIEST
CORPORAL
HEZDREL
SECOND OFFICER
MASTER OF CEREMONIES

SCENES

PART I

1. The Sunday School
2. A Fish Fry
3. A Garden
4. Outside the Garden
5. A Roadside
6. A Private Office
7. Another Roadside and a House
8. A House
9. A Hillside
10. A Mountain Top

PART II

1. The Private Office
2. The Mouth of a Cave
3. A Throne Room
4. The Foot of a Mountain
5. A Cabaret
6. The Private Office
7. Outside a Temple
8. Another Fish Fry

AUTHOR'S NOTE

The Green Pastures is an attempt to present certain aspects of a living religion in the terms of its believers. The religion is that of thousands of Negroes in the deep South. With terrific spiritual hunger and the greatest humility these untutored black Christians—many of whom cannot even read the book which is the treasure house of their faith—have adapted the contents of the Bible to the consistencies of their every day lives.

Unburdened by the differences of more educated theologians they accept the Old Testament as a chronicle of wonders which happened to people like themselves in vague but actual places, and of rules of conduct, true acceptance of which will lead them to a tangible, three-dimensional Heaven. In this Heaven, if one has been born in a district where fish frys are popular, the angels do have magnificent fish frys through an eternity somewhat resembling a series of earthly holidays. The Lord Jehovah will be the promised comforter, a just but compassionate patriarch, the summation of all the virtues His follower has observed in the human beings about him. The Lord may look like the Reverend Mr. Deshee as our Sunday School teacher speculates in the play, or He may resemble another believer's own grandfather. In any event, His face will be familiar to the one who has come for his reward.

The author is indebted to Mr. Roark Bradford, whose retelling of several of the Old Testament stories in *Ol' Man Adam an' His Chillun* first stimulated his interest in this point of view.

One need not blame a hazy memory of the Bible for the failure to recall the characters of Hezdrel, Zeba and others in the play. They are the author's apocrypha, but he believes persons

much like them have figured in the meditations of some of the old Negro preachers, whose simple faith he has tried to translate into a play.

PART ONE

Scene I

A corner in a Negro church.

Ten children and an elderly preacher.

The costumes are those that might be seen in any lower Louisiana town at Sunday-School time. As the curtain rises, Mr. Deshee, *the preacher, is reading from a Bible. The* Children *are listening with varied degrees of interest. Three or four are wide-eyed in their attention. Two or three are obviously puzzled, but interested, and the smallest ones are engaged in more physical concerns. One is playing with a little doll, and another runs his finger on all the angles of his chair.*

Deshee: "An' Adam lived a hundred and thirty years, an' begat a son in his own likeness, after his image; an' called his name Seth. An' de days of Adam, after he had begotten Seth, were eight hundred years; an' he begat sons an' daughters; an' all de days dat Adam lived were nine hundred an' thirty years; an' he died. An' Seth lived a hundred an' five years an' begat Enos; an' Seth lived after he begat Enos eight hundred an' seven years and begat sons and daughters. An' all de days of Seth were nine hundred and twelve years; an' he died." An' it go on like dat till we come to Enoch an' de Book say: "An' Enoch lived sixty an' five years and begat Methuselah." Den it say: "An' all de days of Methuselah were nine hund'ed an' sixty an' nine years an' he died." An' dat was de oldest man dat ever was. Dat's why we call ol' Mr. Gurney's mammy ol' Mrs. Methuselah, caize she's so ol'. Den a little later it tell about another member of de fam'ly. His name was Noah. Maybe some of you know about him already. I'm gonter tell you all about him next Sunday. Anyway dat's de meat an' substance of

de first five chapters of Genesis. Now, how you think you gonter like de Bible ?

MYRTLE : I think it's jest wonderful, Mr. Deshee. I cain't understand any of it.

FIRST BOY : Why did dey live so long, Mr. Deshee ?

DESHEE : Why ? Caize dat was de way God felt.

SECOND BOY : Dat made Adam a way back.

DESHEE : Yes, he certainly 'way back by de time Noah come along. Want to ask me any mo' questions ?

SECOND BOY : What de worl' look like when de Lawd begin, Mr. Deshee ?

DESHEE : How yo' mean what it look like ?

MYRTLE : Carlisle mean who was in N'Orleans den.

DESHEE : Dey wasn't nobody in N'Orleans on 'count dey wasn't any N'Orleans. Dat's de whole idea I tol' you at de end of de first Chapter. Yo' got to git yo' minds fixed. Dey wasn't any Rampart Street. Dey wasn't any Canal Street. Dey wasn't any Louisiana. Dey wasn't nothin' on de earth at all caize fo' de reason dey wasn't any earth.

MYRTLE : Yes, but what Carlisle wanter know is——

DESHEE (*interrupting and addressing little boy who has been playing with his chair and paying no attention*) : Now, Randolph, if you don't listen, how yo' gonter grow up and be a good man ? Yo' wanter grow up an' be a transgressor ?

LITTLE BOY (*frightened*) : No.

DESHEE : You tell yo' mammy yo' sister got to come wid you next time. She kin git de things done in time to bring you to de school. You content yo'self.

[*The little boy straightens up in his chair.*

Now, what do Carlisle want to know ?

Carlisle : How He decide He want de worl' to be right yere and how He git de idea He wanted it ?

Myrtle : Caize de Book say, don't it, Mr. Deshee ?

Deshee : De Book say, but at de same time dat's a good question. I remember when I was a little boy de same thing recurred to me. An' ol' Mr. Dubois, he was a wonderful preacher at New Hope Chapel over in East Gretna, he said : " De answer is dat de Book ain't got time to go into all de details." And he was right. You know sometimes I think de Lawd expects us to figure out a few things for ourselves. We know that at one time dey wasn't anything except Heaven, we don't know jest where it was but we know it was dere. Maybe it was everywhere. Den one day de Lawd got the idea He'd like to make some places. He made de sun and de moon, de stars. An' He made de earth.

Myrtle : Who was aroun' den, nothin' but angels ?

Deshee : I suppose so.

First Boy : What was de angels doin' up dere ?

Deshee : I suppose dey jest flew aroun' and had a good time. Dey wasn't no sin, so dey musta had a good time.

First Boy : Did dey have picnics ?

Deshee : Sho, dey had the nicest kind of picnics. Dey probably had fish frys, wid b'iled custard and ten cent seegars for de adults. God gives us humans lotsa ideas about havin' good times. Maybe dey were things He'd seen de angels do. Yes, sir, I bet dey had a fish fry every week.

Myrtle : Did dey have Sunday School, too ?

DESHEE : Yes, dey musta had Sunday School for de cherubs.

MYRTLE : What did God look like, Mr. Deshee ?

DESHEE : Well, nobody knows exactly what God looked like. But when I was a little boy I used to imagine dat He looked like de Reverend Dubois. He was de finest looking ol' man I ever knew. Yes, I used to bet de Lawd looked exactly like Mr. Dubois in de days when He walked de earth in de shape of a natchel man.

MYRTLE : When was dat, Mr. Deshee ?

DESHEE : Why, when He was gettin' things started down heah. When He talked to Adam and Eve and Noah and Moses and all dem. He made mighty men in dem days. But aldo they was awful mighty dey always knew dat He was beyond dem all. Pretty near one o'clock, time fo' you chillun to go home to dinner, but before I let you go I wan' you to go over wid me de main facts of de first lesson. What's de name of de book ?

CHILDREN : Genesis.

DESHEE : Dat's right. And what's de other name ?

CHILDREN : First Book of Moses.

DESHEE : Dat's right. And dis yere's Chapter One.
[*The lights begin to dim.*] " In de beginnin' God created de heaven an de earth. An' de earth was widout form an' void. An' de darkness was upon de face of de deep."

SCENE II

In the darkness many voices are heard singing " Rise, Shine, Give God The Glory." They sing it gaily and rapidly. The lights go up as the second verse ends. The chorus is being sung diminuendo by a

mixed company of ANGELS. *That is, they are angels in that they wear brightly coloured robes and have wings protruding from their backs. Otherwise they look and act like a company of happy Negroes at a fish fry. The scene itself is a pre-Creation Heaven with compromises. In the distance is an unbroken stretch of blue sky. Companionable varicoloured clouds billow down to the floor of the stage and roll overhead to the branches of a live oak tree which is up left. The tree is leafy and dripping with Spanish moss, and with the clouds makes a frame for the scene. In the cool shade of the tree are the usual appurtenances of a fish fry ; a large kettle of hot fat set on two small parallel logs, with a fire going underneath, and a large rustic table formed by driving four stakes into the ground and placing planks on top of the small connecting boards. On the table are piles of biscuits and corn bread and the cooked fish in dish pans. There are one or two fairly large cedar or crock "churns" containing boiled custard, which looks like milk. There is a gourd dipper beside the churns and several glasses and cups of various sizes and shapes from which the custard is drunk.*

The principal singers are marching two by two in a small area at the R. of the stage. Two MAMMY ANGELS *are attending to the frying beside the kettle. Behind the table a* MAN ANGEL *is skinning fish and passing them to the* COOKS. *Another is ladling out the custard. A* MAMMY ANGEL *is putting fish on bread for a brood of* CHERUBS, *and during the first scene they seat themselves on a grassy bank upstage. Another* MAMMY ANGEL *is clapping her hands disapprovingly and beckoning a laughing* BOY CHERUB *down from a cloud a little out of her reach. Another* MAMMY ANGEL *is solicitously slapping the back of a* GIRL CHERUB *who has a large fish sandwich in her hand and a bone in her throat. There is much movement about the table, and during the first few minutes several individuals go up to the table to help themselves to the food and drink. Many of the women angels wear hats and a few of the men are smoking cigars. A large boxful is on the table. There is much*

laughter and chatter as the music softens, but continues, during the early part of the action. The following short scenes are played almost simultaneously.

First Cook (*at kettle, calling off*) : Hurry up, Cajey. Dis yere fat's cryin' fo' mo' feesh.

A Voice (*off stage*) : We comin', fas' we kin. Dey got to be ketched, ain't dey? We can't say, " C'm'on little fish. C'm'on an' git fried," kin we?

Second Cook (*at table*) : De trouble is de mens is all worm fishin'.

First Man Angel (*at table*) : Whut dif'runce do it make? Yo' all de time got to make out like somebody's doin' somethin' de wrong way.

Second Cook (*near table*) : I s'pose you got de perfec' way fo' makin' bait.

First Man Angel : I ain't sayin' dat. I is sayin' whut's wrong wid worm fishin'.

Second Cook : Whut's wrong wid worm fishin'? Ever'thing, dat's all. Dey's only one good way fo' catfishin', an' dat's minny fishin'. Anybody know dat.

First Man Angel : Well, it jest so happen dat minny fishin' is de doggondest fool way of fishin' dey is. You kin try minny fishin' to de cows come home an' all you catch'll be de backache. De trouble wid you, sister, is you jest got minny fishin' on de brain.

Second Cook : Go right on, loud mouf. You tell me de news. My, my! You jest de wisest person in de worl'. First you, den de Lawd God.

First Man Angel (*to the* Custard Ladler) : You cain't tell dem nothin'. (*Walks away to the custard churn.*) Does you try to 'splain some simple fac' dey git man-deaf.

First Mammy Angel (*to* Cherub *on the cloud*) : Now, you heerd me. (*The* Cherub *assumes*

several mocking poses, as she speaks.) You fly down yere. You wanter be put down in de sin book? (*She goes to the table, gets a drink for herself and points out the* CHERUB *to one of the men behind the table.*) Dat baby must got imp blood in him he so vexin'. (*She returns to her position under the cloud.*) You want me to fly up dere an' slap you down? Now, I tol' you. (*The* CHERUB *starts to come down.*)

STOUT ANGEL (*to the* CHERUB *with a bone in her throat*) : I tol' you you was too little fo' cat fish. What you wanter git a bone in yo' froat fo'? (*She slaps the* CHERUB's *back.*)

SLENDER ANGEL (*leisurely eating a sandwich as she watches the back-slapping*) : What de trouble wid Leonetta?

STOUT ANGEL : She got a catfish bone down her froat. (*To the* CHERUB) Doggone, I tol' you to eat grinnel instead.

SLENDER ANGEL : Ef'n she do git all dat et, she gonter have de belly-ache.

STOUT ANGEL : Ain't I tol' her dat? (*To* CHERUB) Come on now ; let go dat bone. (*She slaps* CHERUB's *back again. The bone is dislodged and the* CHERUB *grins her relief.*) Dat's good.

SLENDER ANGEL (*comfortingly*) : Now she all right.

STOUT ANGEL : Go on an' play wid yo' cousins. (*The* CHERUB *joins the* CHERUBS *sitting on the embankment. The concurrency of scenes ends here.*) I ain't see you lately, Lily. How you been?

SLENDER ANGEL : Me, I'm fine. I been visitin' my mammy. She waitin' on de welcome table over by de throne of grace.

STOUT ANGEL : She always was pretty holy.

SLENDER ANGEL : Yes, ma'am. She like it dere. I guess de Lawd's took quite a fancy to her.

STOUT ANGEL : Well, dat's natural. I declare yo' mammy one of de finest lady angels I know.

SLENDER ANGEL : She claim you de best one she know.

STOUT ANGEL : Well, when you come right down to it, I suppose we is all pretty near perfec'.

SLENDER ANGEL : Yes, ma'am. Why is dat, Mis' Jenny ?

STOUT ANGEL : I s'pose it's caize de Lawd He don' 'low us 'sociatin' wid de devil any mo' so dat dey cain' be no mo' sinnin'.

SLENDER ANGEL : Po' ol' Satan. Whutevah become of him ?

STOUT ANGEL : De Lawd put him some place I s'pose.

SLENDER ANGEL : But dey ain't any place but Heaven, is dey ?

STOUT ANGEL : De Lawd could make a place, couldn't He ?

SLENDER ANGEL : Dat's de truth. Dey's one thing confuses me though.

STOUT ANGEL : What's dat ?

SLENDER ANGEL : I do a great deal of travellin' an' I ain't never come across any place but Heaven anywhere. So if de Lawd kick Satan out of Heaven jest whereat did he go ? Dat's my question.

STOUT ANGEL : You bettah let de Lawd keep His own secrets, Lily. De way things is goin' now dey ain't been no sinnin' since dey give dat scamp a kick in de pants. Nowadays Heaven's free of sin an' if a lady wants a little constitutional she kin fly to she wing-weary widout gittin' insulted.

SLENDER ANGEL : I was jest a baby when Satan lef. I don't even 'member what he look like.

STOUT ANGEL : He was jest right fo' a devil. (*An* ARCHANGEL *enters. He is older than the others and wears a white beard. His clothing is much darker than that of the others and his wings a trifle more imposing.*) Good mo'nin', Archangel.

[*Others say good morning.*

ARCHANGEL : Good mo'nin', folks. I wonder kin I interrup' de fish fry an' give out de Sunday school cyards ? (*Cries of "Suttingly !" "Mah goodness, yes"–etc. The marching* CHOIR *stops.*) You kin keep singin' if you want to. Why don' you sing "When de Saints Come Marchin' In"? Seem to me I ain' heard dat lately. (*The* CHOIR *begins "When the Saints Come Marching In," rather softly, but does not resume marching. The* ARCHANGEL *looks off left.*) All right, bring 'em yere. (*A prim looking* WOMAN TEACHER-ANGEL *enters, shepherding ten* BOY *and* GIRL CHERUBS. *The* TEACHER *carries ten beribboned diplomas, which she gives to the* ARCHANGEL. *The* CHERUBS *are dressed in stiffly starched white suits and dresses, the little* GIRLS *having enormous ribbons at the backs of their dresses and smaller ones in their hair and on the tips of their wings. They line up in front of the* ARCHANGEL *and receive the attention of the rest of the company. The* CHOIR *sings through the ceremony.*) Now den cherubs, why is you yere ?

CHILDREN : Because we so good.

ARCHANGEL : Dat's right. Now who de big boss ?

CHILDREN : Our dear Lawd.

ARCHANGEL : Dat's right. When you all grow up what you gonter be ?

CHILDREN : Holy angels at de throne of grace.

ARCHANGEL : Dat's right. Now, you passed yo' 'xaminations and it gives me great pleasure to hand out de cyards for de whole class. Gineeva Chaproe. (*The* FIRST GIRL CHERUB *goes to him and gets her diploma. The* CHOIR *sings loudly and*

resumes marching, as the ARCHANGEL *calls out another name—and presents diplomas.*) Corey Moulter. (SECOND GIRL CHERUB *gets her diploma.*) Nootzie Winebush. (THIRD GIRL CHERUB.) Harriet Prancy. (FOURTH GIRL CHERUB.) I guess you is Brozain Stew't. (*He gives the* FIFTH GIRL CHERUB *the paper. Each of the presentations has been accompanied by hand-clapping from the bystanders.*) Now you boys know yo' own names. Suppose you come yere and help me git dese 'sorted right?

[BOY CHERUBS *gather about him and receive their diplomas. The little* GIRLS *have scattered about the stage, joining groups of the adult angels. The angel* GABRIEL *enters. He is bigger and more elaborately winged than even the* ARCHANGEL, *but he is also much younger and beardless. His costume is less conventional than that of the other men, resembling more the Gabriel of the Doré drawings. His appearance causes a flutter among the others. They stop their chattering with the children. The* CHOIR *stops as three or four audible whispers of "Gabriel!" are heard. In a moment the heavenly company is all attention.*

GABRIEL (*lifting his hand*) : Gangway! Gangway for de Lawd God Jehovah!

[*There is a reverent hush and* GOD *enters. He is the tallest and biggest of them all. He wears a white shirt with a white bow tie, a long Prince Albert coat of black alpaca, black trousers and congress gaiters. He looks at the assemblage. There is a pause. He speaks in a rich, bass voice.*

GOD : Is you been baptized?

OTHERS (*chanting*) : Certainly, Lawd.

GOD : Is you been baptized?

OTHERS : Certainly, Lawd.

GOD (*with the beginning of musical notation*) : Is you been baptized?

OTHERS (*now half-singing*) : Certainly, Lawd Certainly, certainly, certainly, Lawd.

[*They sing the last two verses with equivalent part division.*

Is you been redeemed ?
Certainly, Lawd.
Is you been redeemed ?
Certainly, Lawd.
Is you been redeemed ?
Certainly, Lawd. Certainly, certainly, certainly, Lawd.

Do you bow mighty low ?
Certainly, Lawd.
Do you bow mighty low ?
Certainly, Lawd.
Do you bow mighty low ?
Certainly, Lawd. Certainly, certainly, certainly, Lawd.

[*As the last response ends all heads are bowed.* GOD *looks at them for a moment ; then lifts His hand.*

GOD : Let de fish fry proceed.

[EVERYONE *rises. The* ANGELS *relax and resume their inaudible conversations. The activity behind the table and about the cauldron is resumed. Some of the* CHOIR *members cross to the table and get sandwiches and cups of the boiled custard. Three or four of the* CHILDREN *in the Sunday School class and the little* GIRL *who had the bone in her throat affectionately group themselves about* GOD *as He speaks with the* ARCHANGEL. *He pats their heads, they hang to His coat-tails, etc.*

ARCHANGEL : Good mo'nin', Lawd.

GOD : Good mo'nin', Deacon. You lookin' pretty spry.

ARCHANGEL : I cain' complain. We just been givin' our cyards to de chillun.

GOD : Dat's good.

[*A small* CHERUB, *his feet braced against one of* GOD's *shoes is using* GOD's *coat as a trapeze. One of the* COOKS *offers a fish sandwich which* GOD *politely declines.*

FIRST MAMMY ANGEL : Now, you leave go de Lawd's coat, Herman. You heah me ?

GOD : Dat's all right, sister. He jest playin'.

FIRST MAMMY ANGEL : He playin' too rough.

[GOD *picks up the* CHERUB *and spanks him good-naturedly. The* CHERUB *squeals with delight and runs to his mother.* GABRIEL *advances to* GOD *with a glass of the custard.*

GABRIEL : Little b'iled custud, Lawd ?

GOD : Thank you very kindly. Dis looks nice.

CUSTARD MAKER (*offering a box*) : Ten cent seegar, Lawd ?

GOD (*taking it*) : Thank you, thank you. How de fish fry goin' ? (*Ad lib. cries of* " *O.K., Lawd,*" " *Fine an' dandy, Lawd,*" " *De best one yit, Lawd,*" *etc. To the* CHOIR.) How you shouters gittin' on ?

CHOIR LEADER : We been marchin' and singin' de whole mo'nin'.

GOD : I heerd you. You gittin' better all de time. You gittin' as good as de one at de throne. Why don't you give us one dem ol' time jump-ups ?

CHOIR LEADER : Anythin' you say, Lawd. (*To the others.*) " So High ! "

[*The* CHOIR *begins to sing* " *So High You Can't Get Over It.*" *They sing softly, but do not march. An* ANGEL *offers his cigar to* GOD *from which He can light His own.*

GOD : No, thanks. I'm gonter save dis a bit.

[*He puts the cigar in His pocket and listens to the*

singers a moment. Then He sips His custard. After the second sip, a look of displeasure comes on His face.]

GABRIEL : What's de matter, Lawd ?

GOD (*sipping again*) : I ain't jest sure, yit. Dey's something 'bout dis custahd. (*Takes another sip.*)

CUSTARD MAKER : Ain't it all right, Lawd ?

GOD : It don't seem seasoned jest right. You make it ?

CUSTARD MAKER : Yes, Lawd. I put everythin' in it like I allus do. It's supposed to be perfec'.

GOD : Yeah. I kin taste de eggs and de cream and de sugar. (*Suddenly.*) I know what it is. It needs jest a little bit mo' firmament.

CUSTARD MAKER : Dey's firmament in it, Lawd.

GOD : Maybe, but it ain't enough.

CUSTARD MAKER : It's all we had, Lawd. Dey ain't a drap in de jug.

GOD : Dat's all right. I'll jest r'ar back an' pass a miracle. (CHOIR *stops singing.*) Let it be some firmament ! An' when I say let it be some firmament, I don't want jest a little bitty dab o' firmament, caize I'm sick an' tired of runnin' out of it when we need it. Let it be a whole mess of firmament ! (*The stage has become misty until* GOD *and the heavenly company are obscured. As He finishes the speech there is a burst of thunder. As the stage grows darker.*) Dat's de way I like it.

[*Murmurs from the others : " Dat's a lot of firmament," " My, dat is firmament ! " " Look to me like He's created rain," etc.*

FIRST MAMMY ANGEL (*when the stage is dark*) : Now, look Lawd, dat's too much firmament. De Cherubs is gettin' all wet.

SECOND MAMMY ANGEL : Look at my Carlotta, Lawd. She's soaked to de skin. Dat's *plenty* too much firmament.

GOD : Well, 'co'se we don't want de chillun to ketch cold. Can't you dreen it off?

GABRIEL : Dey's no place to dreen it, Lawd.

FIRST MAMMY ANGEL : Why don't we jest take de babies home, Lawd?

GOD : No, I don't wanta bust up de fish fry. You angels keep quiet an I'll pass another miracle. Dat's always de trouble wid miracles. When you pass one you always gotta r'ar back an' pass another. (*There is a hush.*) Let dere be a place to dreen off dis firmament. Let dere be mountains and valleys an' let dere be oceans an' lakes. An' let dere be rivers and bayous to dreen it off in, too. As a matter of fac' let dere be de earth. An' when dat's done let dere be de sun, an' let it come out and dry my Cherubs' wings.

[*The lights go up until the stage is bathed in sunlight. On the embankment upstage there is now a waist-high wrought iron railing such as one sees on the galleries of houses in the French quarter of New Orleans. The* CHERUBS *are being examined by their parents and there is an ad lib. murmur of, "You all right, honey?" "You feel better now, Albert?" "Now you all dry, Vangy?" until the* ARCHANGEL, *who has been gazing in awe at the railings, drowns them out.*

ARCHANGEL : Look yere !

[*There is a rush to the embankment accompanied by exclamations, "My goodness!" "What's dis?" "I declah!" etc.* GABRIEL *towers above the group on the middle of the embankment.* GOD *is wrapped in thought, facing the audience. The* CHOIR *resumes singing "So High You Can't Get Over It" softly. The babbling at the balustrade dies away as the people lean over the railing.* GABRIEL *turns and faces* GOD *indicating the earth below the railing with his left hand.*

GABRIEL : Do you see it, Lawd?

GOD (*quietly, without turning his head upstage*) : Yes, Gabriel.

GABRIEL : Looks mighty nice, Lawd.

GOD : Yes.

[GABRIEL *turns and looks over the railing.*

GABRIEL (*gazing down*) : Yes, suh. Dat'd make mighty nice farming country. Jest look at dat South forty over dere. You ain't going to let dat go to waste is you, Lawd ? Dat would be a pity an' a shame.

GOD (*not turning*) : It's a good earth. (GOD *turns, room is made for Him beside* GABRIEL *on the embankment.*) Yes, I ought to have somebody to enjoy it. (*He turns, facing the audience. The others, save for the* CHOIR *who are lined up in two rows of six on an angle up right, continue to look over the embankment.*) Gabriel ! (GOD *steps down from the embankment two paces.*)

GABRIEL (*joining him*) : Yes, Lawd.

GOD : Gabriel, I'm going down dere.

GABRIEL : Yes, Lawd.

GOD : I want you to be my working boss yere while I'm gone.

GABRIEL : Yes, Lawd.

GOD : You know dat matter of dem two stars ?

GABRIEL : Yes, Lawd.

GOD : Git dat fixed up ! You know dat sparrow dat fell a little while ago ? 'Tend to dat, too.

GABRIEL : Yes, Lawd.

GOD : I guess dat's about all. I'll be back Saddy. (*To the* CHOIR.) Quiet, angels. (*The* CHOIR *stops singing. Those on the embankment circle down stage.* GOD *goes to embankment. Turns and faces the company.*) I'm gonter pass one more miracle. You all gonter help me an' not make a soun'

caize it's one of de most impo'tant miracles of all. (*Nobody moves.* GOD *turns, facing the sky and raises His arms above His head.*) Let there be man.

[*There is growing roll of thunder as stage grows dark. The* CHOIR *bursts into "Hallelujah," and continues until the lights go up on the next scene.*

SCENE III

Enclosing the stage is a heterogeneous cluster of cottonwood, camphor, live oak and sycamore trees, youpon and turkey berry bushes, with their purple and red berries, sprays of fern-like indigo fiera and splashes of various Louisiana flowers. In the middle of the stage, disclosed when the mistiness at rise grows into warm sunlight, stands ADAM. *He is a puzzled man of 30, of medium height, dressed in the clothing of the average field hand. He is bare-headed. In the distance can be heard the* CHOIR *continuing "Bright Mansions Above." A bird begins to sing.* ADAM *smiles and turns to look at the source of this novel sound. He senses his strength and raises his forearms, his fists clenched. With his left hand he carefully touches the muscles of his upper right arm. He smiles again, realising his power. He looks at his feet which are stretched wide apart. He stamps once or twice and now almost laughs in his enjoyment. Other birds begin trilling and* ADAM *glances up joyfully toward the foliage.* GOD *enters.*

GOD : Good mo'nin', Son.

ADAM (*with a little awe*) : Good mo'nin', Lawd.

GOD : What's yo' name, Son ?

ADAM : Adam.

GOD : Adam which ?

ADAM (*frankly, after a moment's puzzled groping*) : Jest Adam, Lawd.

GOD : Well, Adam, how dey treatin' you ? How things goin' ?

ADAM : Well, Lawd, You know it's kind of a new line of wukk.

GOD : You'll soon get de hang of it. You know yo' kind of a new style with Me.

ADAM : Oh, I guess I'm gonter make out all right soon as I learn de ropes.

GOD : Yes, I guess you will. Yo' a nice job.

ADAM : Yes, Lawd.

GOD : Dey's jest one little thing de matter with you. Did you notice it ?

ADAM : Well, now You mentioned it, Lawd, I kind of thought dey was somethin' wrong.

GOD : Yes suh, you ain't quite right. Adam, you need a family. De reason for dat is in yo' heart you is a family man. (*Flicking the ash off His cigar.*) I'd say dat was de main trouble at de moment.

ADAM (*smiling*) : Yes sir. (*His smile fades and he is puzzled again.*) At de same time—dey's one thing puzzlin' me, Lawd. Could I ask You a question ?

GOD : Why, certainly, Adam.

ADAM : Lawd, jest what *is* a family ?

GOD : I'm gonter show you. (*Indicates a spot.*) Jest lie down dere, Adam. Make out like you was goin' to slumber.

ADAM (*gently*) : Yes, Lawd.

[*He lies down.* GOD *stands beside him and as He raises His arms above His head the lights go down. In the darkness* GOD *speaks.*

GOD : Eve. (*Lights go up.* EVE *is standing beside* ADAM. *She is about twenty-six, and quite pretty. She is dressed like a country girl. Her gingham dress is quite new and clean.* GOD *is now at the other side of the stage, looking at them critically.* EVE *looks at* ADAM *in timid wonder and slowly turns her head*

until she meets the glance of GOD. ADAM *stands beside* EVE. *They gaze at each other for a moment.* GOD *smiles.*) Now you all right, Eve. (ADAM *and* EVE *face Him.*) Now I'll tell you what I'm gonter do. I'm gonter put you in charge here. I'm gonter give you de run of dis whole garden. Eve, you take care of dis man an' Adam you take care of dis woman. You belong to each other. I don't want you to try to do too much caize yo' both kind of experiment wid Me an' I ain't sho' whether you could make it. You two jest enjoy yo'self. Drink de water from de little brooks an' de wine from de grapes an' de berries, an' eat de food dat's hangin' for you in de trees. (*He pauses, startled by a painful thought.*) Dat is, in all but one tree. (*He pauses. Then, not looking at them.*) You know what I mean, my children ?

ADAM AND EVE : Yes, Lawd. (*They slowly turn their heads left, toward the branches of an offstage tree. Then they look back at* GOD.)

ADAM : Thank you, Lawd.

EVE : Thank you, Lawd.

GOD : I gotter be gittin' along now. I got a hund'ed thousan' things to do 'fo' you take yo' nex' breath. Enjoy yo'selves——

[GOD *exits.*

ADAM *and* EVE *stand looking after Him for a moment, then each looks down and watches their hands meet and clasp.*

After a moment they lift their heads slowly until they are again gazing at the tree.

EVE : Adam.

ADAM (*looking at the tree, almost in terror*) : What ?

EVE (*softly as she too continues to look at the tree*) : Adam.

[*The* CHOIR *begins singing "Turn You Round" and as the lights go down the* CHOIR *continues until there is blackness. The* CHOIR *suddenly stops. The following scene is played in the darkness.*

MR. DESHEE'S VOICE : Now, I s'pose you chillun know what happened after God made Adam 'n' Eve. Do you ?

FIRST GIRL'S VOICE : I know, Mr. Deshee.

MR. DESHEE'S VOICE : Jest a minute, Randolph. Didn't I tell you you gotta tell yo' mammy let yo' sister bring you. Carlisle, take way dat truck he's eatin'. You sit by him, see kin you keep him quiet. Now den, Myrtle, what happened ?

FIRST GIRL'S VOICE : Why, den dey ate de fo'bidden fruit and den dey got driv' out de garden.

MR. DESHEE'S VOICE : An' den what happened ?

FIRST GIRL'S VOICE : Den dey felt ver bad.

MR. DESHEE'S VOICE : I don' mean how dey feel, I mean how dey do. Do dey have any children or anything like dat ?

FIRST GIRL'S VOICE : Oh, yes, suh, dey have Cain 'n' Abel.

MR. DESHEE'S VOICE : Dat's right, dey have Cain an' Abel.

BOY'S VOICE : Dat was a long time after dey got married, wasn't it, Mr. Deshee ? My mammy say it was a hund'ed years.

MR. DESHEE'S VOICE : Well, nobody kin be so sure. As I tol' you befo' dey was jest beginnin' to be able to tell de time an' nobody was any too sure 'bout anythin' even den. So de bes' thing to do is jest realise dat de thing happened an' don't bother 'bout how many years it was. Jest remember what I told you about it gittin' dark when you go to sleep an' it bein' light when you wake up. Dat's de way time went by in dem days. One thing we do know an' dat was dis boy Cain was a mean rascal.

[*The lights go up on the next scene.*

Scene IV

A roadside.

Cain, *a husky young Negro, stands over the body of the dead* Abel. *Both are dressed as labourers.* Cain *is looking at the body in awe, a rock in his right hand.* God *enters.*

God : Cain, look what you done to Abel.

Cain : Lawd, I was min'in' my own business and he come monkeyin' aroun' wit' me. I was wukkin' in de fiel' an' he was sittin' in de shade of de tree. He say " Me, I'd be skeered to git out in dis hot sun. I be 'fraid my brains git cooked. Co'se you ain't got no brains so you ain' in no danger." An' so I up and flang de rock. If it miss 'im all right, an' if it hit 'im, all right. Dat's de way I feel.

God : All right, but I'm yere to tell you dat's called a crime. When de new Judge is done talkin' to you you'll be draggin' a ball and chain de rest of yo' life.

Cain : Well, what'd he want to come monkeyin'' aroun' me fo' den ? I was jest plowin', min'in my own business, and not payin' him no min', and yere he come makin' me de fool. I'd bust anybody what make me de fool.

God : Well, I ain't sayin' you right an' I ain't sayin' you wrong. But I do say was I you I'd jest got myself down de road 'til I was clean out of de county. An' you better take an' git married an' settle down an' raise some chillun. Dey ain't nothin' to make a man fo'git his troubles like raisin' a family. Now, you better git.

Cain : Yessuh.

[Cain *walks off.*

God *watches him from the forestage and as the lights begin to dim looks off. The* Choir *begins* " *Run, Sinner, Run.*"

GOD : Adam an' Eve you better try again. You better have Seth an' a lot mo' chillun.

[*There is darkness. The* CHOIR *continues until the lights go up on the next scene.*

SCENE V

CAIN *is discovered walking on an unseen treadmill. A middle distance of trees, hillsides and shrubbery passes him on an upper treadmill. Behind is the blue sky. He stops under the branches of a tree to look at a sign on a fence railing. Only half the tree is visible on the stage. The sign reads,* "NOD PARISH. COUNTY LINE."

CAIN (*sitting down with a sigh of relief under the tree*) : At las' ! Phew ! (*Wipes his forehead with a handkerchief.*) Feels like I been walkin' fo'ty years. (*He looks back.*) Well, dey cain' git me now. Now I kin raise a fam'ly. (*An idea occurs to him, and suddenly he begins looking right and left.*) Well, I'll be hit by a mule ! Knock me down for a trustin' baby ! Where I gonter git dat fam'ly ? Dat preacher fooled me. (*He is quite dejected.*) Doggone !

CAIN'S GIRL (*off stage*) : Hello, Country Boy !

[CAIN *glances up to the offstage branches of the tree.*

CAIN : Hey-ho, Good lookin' ! Which way is it to town ?

CAIN'S GIRL (*off stage*) : What you tryin' to do ? You tryin' to mash me ? I be doggone if it ain't gittin' so a gal cain't hardly leave de house to some of dese fast men ain' passin' remarks at her.

CAIN : I ain' passin' remarks.

CAIN'S GIRL (*off stage*) : If I thought you was tryin' to mash me, I'd call de police an' git you tooken to de first precinct.

CAIN : Look yere, gal, I ast you a question, an' if you don' answer me I'm gonter bend you 'cross my pants an' burn you up.

CAIN'S GIRL (*off stage*) : I'm comin' down.

[CAIN *take his eyes from the tree.*

CAIN : Yes, an' you better hurry.

[CAIN'S GIRL *enters. She is as large as* CAIN, *wickedly pretty, and somewhat flashily dressed. She smiles at* CAIN.

CAIN'S GIRL : I bet you kin handle a gal mean wid dem big stout arms of your'n. I sho' would hate to git you mad at me, Country Boy.

CAIN (*smiling*) : Come yere. (*She goes a little closer to him.*) Don't be 'fraid, I ain' so mean.

CAIN'S GIRL : You got two bad lookin' eyes. I bet yo' hot coffee 'mong de women folks.

CAIN : I ain' never find out. What was you doin' in dat tree ?

CAIN'S GIRL : Jest coolin' myself in de element.

CAIN : Is you a Nod Parish gal ?

CAIN'S GIRL : Bo'n an' bred.

CAIN : You know yo' kinda pretty.

CAIN'S GIRL : Who tol' you dat ?

CAIN : Dese yere two bad eyes of mine.

CAIN'S GIRL : I bet you say dat to everybody all de way down de road.

CAIN : Comin' down dat road I didn't talk to nobody.

CAIN'S GIRL : Where you boun' for, Beautiful ?

CAIN : I'm jest seein' de country. I thought I might settle down yere fo' a spell. You live wit' yo' people ?

CAIN'S GIRL : Co'se I does.

CAIN : S'pose dey'd like to take in a boarder ?

CAIN'S GIRL : Be nice if dey would, wouldn't it ?

CAIN : I think so. You got a beau ?

CAIN'S GIRL : Huh-uh !

CAIN (*smiling*) : You has *now*.

CAIN'S GIRL : I guess—I guess if you wanted to kiss me an' I tried to stop you, you could pretty nearly crush me wit' dem stout arms.

CAIN : You wouldn't try too much, would you ?

CAIN'S GIRL : Maybe for a little while.

CAIN : An' den what ?

CAIN'S GIRL : Why don' we wait an'see ?

CAIN : When would dat be ?

CAIN'S GIRL : To-night. After supper. Think you kin walk a little further now, City Boy ?

CAIN : Yeh, I ain't so weary now.

[*She takes his hand.*

CAIN'S GIRL : What yo' name ? (*Takes his arm.*)

CAIN : Cain.

CAIN'S GIRL : Then I'm Cain's Gal. Come on, honey, an' meet de folks.

[*They exit.*

[*The* CHOIR *is heard singing* "*You Better Mind*," *as* GOD *enters.* GOD *watches the vanished* CAIN *and his girl.*

GOD (*after shaking His head*) : Bad business. I don' like de way things is goin' atall.

[*The stage is darkened.*

[*The* CHOIR *continues singing until the lights go up on the next scene.*

SCENE VI

GOD'S *private office in Heaven. It is a small room, framed by tableau curtains. A large window up centre*

looks out on the sky. There is a battered roll-top desk. On the wall next to the window is a framed religious oleograph with a calendar attached to it underneath. A door is at the left. A hat rack is on the wall above the door. There are two or three cheap pine chairs beside the window, and beyond the door. In front of the desk is an old swivel armchair which creaks every time GOD *leans back in it. The desk is open and various papers are stuck in the pigeonholes. Writing implements, etc. are on the desk. On a shelf above the desk is a row of law books. A cuspidor is near the desk, and a waste basket by it. The general atmosphere is that of the office of a Negro lawyer in a Louisiana town. As the lights go up* GOD *takes a fresh cigar from a box on the desk and begins puffing it without bothering to light it. There is no comment on this minor miracle from* GABRIEL *who is sitting in one of the chairs with a pencil and several papers in his hand. The singing becomes pianissimo.*

GABRIEL (*looking at the papers*) : Well, I guess dat's about all de impo'tant business this mornin', Lawd.

GOD : How 'bout dat Cherub over to Archangel Montgomery's house ?

GABRIEL : Where do dey live, Lawd ?

[*The singing stops.*

GOD : Dat little two story gold house, over by de pearly gates.

GABRIEL : Oh, *dat* Montgomery. I thought you was referrin' to de ol' gentleman. Oh, yeh. (*He sorts through the papers and finds one he is looking for.*) Yere it 'tis. (*Reads.*) " Cherub Christina Montgomery ; wings is moltin' out of season an' nobody knows what to do."

GOD : Well, now, take keer of dat. You gotter be more careful, Gabe.

GABRIEL : Yes, Lawd.

[*Folds the papers and puts them in a pocket.* GOD *turns to His desk, takes another puff or two of the*

cigar, and with a pencil, begins checking off items on a sheet of paper before Him. His back is turned toward GABRIEL. GABRIEL *takes his trumpet from the hat rack and burnishes it with his robe. He then wets his lips and puts the mouthpiece to his mouth.*

GOD (*without turning around*) : Now, watch yo'-self, Gabriel.

GABRIEL : I wasn't goin' to blow, Lawd. I jest do dat every now an' den so I can keep de feel of it.

[*He leans trumpet against the wall.* GOD *picks up the papers and swings His chair around toward* GABRIEL.

GOD : What's dis yere about de moon ?

GABRIEL (*suddenly remembering*) : Oh ! De moon people say it's beginnin' to melt a little, on 'count caize de sun's so hot.

GOD : It's goin' 'round' 'cordin' to schedule, ain't it ?

GABRIEL : Yes, Lawd.

GOD : Well, tell 'em to stop groanin'. Dere's nothin' de matter wid dat moon. Trouble is so many angels is flyin' over dere on Saddy night. Dey git to beatin' dere wings when dey dancin' an' dat makes de heat. Tell dem dat from now on dancin' 'roun' de moon is sinnin'. Dey got to stop it. Dat'll cool off de moon. (*He swings back and puts the paper on the desk. He leans back in the chair comfortably, His hands clasped behind His head.*) Is dere anythin' else you ought to remin' me of ?

GABRIEL : De prayers, Lawd.

GOD (*puzzled, slowly swinging chair around again*) : De prayers ?

GABRIEL : From mankind. You know, down on de earth.

GOD : Oh, yeh, de poor little earth. Bless My soul, I almos' forgot about dat. Mus' be three or

four hund'ed years since I been down dere. I wasn't any too pleased wid dat job.

GABRIEL (*laughing*) : You know you don' make mistakes, Lawd.

GOD (*soberly, with introspective detachment*) : So dey tell Me. (*He looks at* GABRIEL, *then through the window again.*) So dey tell Me. I fin' I kin be displeased though, an' I was displeased wid de mankind I las' seen. Maybe I ought to go down dere agin—I need a little holiday.

GABRIEL : Might do you good, Lawd.

GOD : I think I will. I'll go down an' walk de earth agin an' see how dem poor humans is makin' out. What time is it, by de sun an' de stars ?

GABRIEL (*glancing out of the window*) : Jest exactly half-past, Lawd.

[GOD *is taking His hat and stick from the hat rack.*

GOD (*opening the door*) : Well, take keer o' yo'self. I'll be back Saddy. (*He exits.*)

[*The stage is darkened. The* CHOIR *begins "Dere's No Hidin' Place," and continues until the lights go up on the next scene.*

SCENE VII

GOD *is walking along a country road. He stops to listen. Church bells are heard in the distance.*

GOD : Dat's nice. Nice an' quiet. Dat's de way I like Sunday to be. (*The sound is broken by a shrill voice of a girl. It is* ZEBA *singing a "blues."*) Now, dat ain't so good. (GOD *resumes His walk and the upper treadmill brings on a tree stump on which* ZEBA *is sitting. She is accompanying her song with a ukulele.* GOD *and the treadmills stop. When the stump reaches the centre of the stage, it is seen that* ZEBA *is a rouged and extremely flashily dressed chippy of about eighteen.*) Stop dat !

ZEBA : What's de matter wid you, Country Boy ? Pull up yo' pants. (*She resumes singing.*)

GOD : Stop dat !

ZEBA (*stops again*) : Say, listen to me, Banjo Eyes. What right you got to stop a lady enjoyin' herself ?

GOD : Don't you know dis is de Sabbath ? Da's no kin' o' song to sing on de Lawd's day.

ZEBA : Who care 'bout de Lawd's day, anymo' ? People jest use Sunday now to git over Saddy.

GOD : You a awful sassy little girl.

ZEBA : I come fum sassy people ! We even speak mean of de dead.

GOD : What's yo' name ?

ZEBA (*flirtatiously*) : " What's my name ? " Ain't You de ol'-time gal hunter ! Fust, " What's my name ? " den I s'pose what would it be like if You tried to kiss me ? You preachers is de debbils.

GOD : I ain't aimin' to touch you daughter. (*A sudden sternness frightens* ZEBA. *She looks at him sharply.*) What is yo' name ?

ZEBA : Zeba.

GOD : Who's yo' fam'ly ?

ZEBA : I'm de great-great gran' daughter of Seth.

GOD : Of Seth ? But Seth was a good man.

ZEBA : Yeh, he too good, he die of holiness.

GOD : An' yere's his little gran' daughter reekin' wid cologne. Ain't nobody ever tol' you yo' on de road to Hell ?

ZEBA (*smiling*) : Sho' dat's what de preacher say. Exceptin' of course, I happens to know dat I'm on de road to de picnic groun's, an' at de present time I'm waitin' to keep a engagement

wid my sweet papa. He don't like people talkin' to me.

[CAIN THE SIXTH *enters. He is a young buck, wearing a " box " coat and the other flashy garments of a Rampart Street swell.*

CAIN THE SIXTH : Hello, sugah ! (*He crosses in front of* GOD *and faces* ZEBA.) Hello, mamma ! Sorry I'm late baby, but de gals in de barrel-house jest wouldn't let me go. Doggone, one little wirehead swore she'd tear me down.

[ZEBA *smiles and takes his hand.*

GOD : What's yo' name, son ?

CAIN THE SIXTH (*contemptuously ; without turning*) : Soap 'n water, Country Boy.

God (*sternly*) : What's yo' name, son ?

[CAIN *slowly turns and for a moment his manner is civil.*

CAIN THE SIXTH : Cain the Sixth.

GOD : I was afraid so.

CAIN THE SIXTH (*his impudence returning*) : You a new preacher ?

GOD : Where you live ?

CAIN THE SIXTH : Me, I live mos' any place.

GOD : Yes, an' you gonter see dem all. Is de udder young men all like you ?

CAIN THE SIXTH (*smiling*) : De gals don' think so.

[*He turns towards* ZEBA *again, picks her up and sits on the stump with the laughing* ZEBA *on his lap.*

ZEBA : Dey ain't nobody in de worl' like my honey-cake.

[CAIN *kisses her and she resumes her song.*

[GOD *watches them.* ZEBA *finishes a verse of the song and begins another softly.* CAIN THE SIXTH'S *eyes have been closed during the singing.*

CAIN THE SIXTH (*his eyes closed*) : Is de preacher gone ?

[ZEBA *looks quickly at* GOD *without seeing Him, and then looks off. She stops the song.*

ZEBA : Yeh, I guess He walks fast.

[CAIN *pushes her off his lap and rises.*

CAIN THE SIXTH (*with acid sweetness*) : Dey tell me las' night you was talkin' to a creeper man, baby.

ZEBA : Why, you know dey ain't nobody in de world fo' me but you.

CAIN THE SIXTH (*smiling*) : I know dey ain't. I even got dat guaranteed. (*Takes a revolver from his pocket.*) See dat, baby ?

ZEBA : Sho' I see it, honey.

CAIN THE SIXTH : Dat jest makes me positive. (*Puts the gun back.*)

ZEBA (*pushing him back on the stump*) : You don't wanter believe dem stories, papa.

CAIN THE SIXTH (*with sinister lightness*) : No, I didn't believe dem, baby. Co'se dat big gorilla, Flatfoot, from de other side of de river *is* in town ag'in.

ZEBA : Dat don' mean nothin'. Flatfoot ain't nothin' to me.

CAIN THE SIXTH (*sitting again*) : Co'se he ain't. Go 'head, sing some mo, baby.

[ZEBA *resumes singing.*

GOD : Bad business. (*The treadmills start turning.* GOD *resumes His walk.* ZEBA, *still singing, and* CAIN THE SIXTH *recede with the landscape.* GOD *is again alone on the country road. There is a twitter of birds.* GOD *looks up and smiles.*) De birds is goin' 'bout dere business, all right. (*A patch of flowers goes by, blackeyed Susans, conspicuously.*) How you flowers makin' out ? (*Children's voices answer,* " *We O.K., Lawd.*") Yes, an' you looks very

pretty. (*Children's voices :* " *Thank you, Lawd.*" *The flowers pass out of sight.*) It's only de human bein's makes Me downhearted. Yere's as nice a Sunday as dey is turnin' out anywhere, an' nobody makin' de right use of it. (*Something ahead of Him attracts His attention. His face brightens.*) Well, now dis is mo' like it. Now dat's nice to see people prayin'. It's a wonder dey don' do it in de church. But I fin' I don' min' it if dey do it outdoors.

[*A group of five adult Negroes and a boy on their knees in a semicircle appears. The treadmills stop. The* Boy, *his head bent, swings his hands rhythmically up to his head three or four times. There is a hush.*

Gambler : Oh, Lawd, de smoke-house is empty. Oh, Lawd, lemme git dem groceries. Oh, Lawd, lemme see dat little *six.* (*He casts the dice.*) Wham ! Dere she is, frien's.

[*Exclamations from the others :* " *Well, damn my eyes !* " " *Doggone, dat's de eighth pass he made.*" " *For God's sake, can't you ever crap ?* " *etc. The* Boy *is picking up the money.*

God : Gamblin' ! (*Looks over the group's shoulders.*) An' wid frozen dice !

Boy Gambler : Dey's a dolla' 'n' a half talkin' fo' me. How much you want of it, Riney ?

First Gambler : I take fo' bits. Wait a minute. Mebbe I take a little mo'. (*He counts some money in his hand.*)

Second Gambler (*glancing up at* God) : Hello, Liver Lips. (*To the others.*) Looka ol' Liver Lips.

[*The others look up and laugh good-naturedly, repeating* " *Liver Lips.*"

First Gambler : Ain't His pockets high from de groun' ? Ol' High-Pockets.

[*The others keep saying* " *Ole Liver Lips,*" " *Ol' Liver Lips don't like to see people dicin',*" " *Dat's a good name,* ' *High Pockets.*' "

BOY GAMBLER (*to others*) : Come on, you gonter fade me or not ?

[GOD *seizes the* BOY'S *ears and drags him to his feet. The others do not move, but watch, amused.*

GOD : Come yere, son. Why, yo' jest a little boy. Gamblin' an' sinnin'. (GOD *looks at the* BOY'S *face.*) You been chewin' tobacco, too, like you was yo' daddy. (GOD *sniffs.*) An' you been drinkin' sonny-kick-mammy-wine. You oughta be 'shamed. (*To the others.*) An' you gamblers oughta be 'shamed, leadin' dis boy to sin.

FIRST GAMBLER : He de bes' crap shooter in town, mister.

GOD : I'm gonter tell his mammy. I bet she don' know 'bout dis.

FIRST GAMBLER : No, she don' know. (*The others laugh.*) She don't know anythin'.

SECOND GAMBLER : Das de God's truth.

FIRST GAMBLER : See kin you beat 'im, High Pockets. Dey's a dolla' open yere.

GOD : I ain't gonter beat 'im. I'm gonter teach 'im. I may have to teach you all.

[*He starts walking from them. The* BOY *sticks out his tongue the moment* GOD'S *back is turned.*

BOY GAMBLER : If you fin' my mammy you do mo'n I kin. Come on, gamblers, see kin you gimme a little action. Who wants any part of dat dollar ?

[*The treadmill carries them off. The* FIRST GAMBLER *is heard saying :* "*I'll take anoder two bits,*" *and the others,* "*Gimme a dime's wo'th,*" "*I ain't only got fifteen cents left,*" *etc., as they disappear.*

GOD (*walking*) : Where's dat little Boy's home ? (*The front of a shanty appears and* GOD *stops in front of the door.*) Yere's de place. It ain't any too clean, either.

[*Knocks on the door with his cane.*

VOICE IN SHANTY : Who dar ?

GOD : Never you min' who's yere. Open de door.

VOICE IN SHANTY : You gotta search warrant ?

GOD : I don' need one.

VOICE IN SHANTY : Who you wanter see ?

GOD : I wanter see de mammy of de little gamblin' boy.

VOICE IN SHANTY : You mean little Johnny Rucker ?

GOD : Dat may be his name.

VOICE IN SHANTY : Well, Mrs. Rucker ain't home.

GOD : Where's she at ?

VOICE IN SHANTY : Who, Mrs. Rucker ?

GOD : You heerd me.

VOICE IN SHANTY : Oh, she run away las' night wid a railroad man. She's eloped.

GOD : Where's Rucker ?

VOICE IN SHANTY : He's flat under de table. He's so drunk he cain't move.

GOD : Who are you ?

VOICE IN SHANTY : I'se jest a fren' an' neighbor. I come in las' night to de party, an' everybody in yere's dead drunk but me. De only reason I kin talk is I drank some new white mule I made myself, an' it burn my throat so I cain't drink no mo'. You got any mo' questions ?

GOD : Not for you.

[*The shanty begins to move off as* GOD *starts walking again.*

VOICE IN SHANTY : Good riddance, I say.

[*Shanty disappears.*

GOD : Dis ain't gittin' Me nowheres. All I gotta say dis yere mankind I been peoplin' my earth wid sho' ain't much. (*He stops and looks back.*) I got good min' to wipe 'em all off an' people de earth wid angels. No. Angels is all right, singin' an' playin' an' flyin' around, but dey ain't much on workin' de crops and buildin' de levees. No suh, mankind's jest right for my earth, if he wasn't so doggone sinful. I'd rather have my earth peopled wit' a bunch of channel catfish, dan I would mankin' an' his sin. I jest cain't stan' sin.

[*He is about to resume his walk when* NOAH *enters.*

NOAH *is dressed like a country preacher. His coat is of the "hammer-tail" variety. He carries a prayer book under his arm.*

NOAH : Mo'nin', brother.

GOD : Mo'nin', brother. I declare you look like a good man.

NOAH : I try to be, brother. I'm de preacher yere. I don't think I seen you to de meetin'.

[*They resume walking.*

GOD : I jest come to town a little while ago an' I been pretty busy.

NOAH : Yeh, mos' everybody say dey's pretty busy dese days. Dey so busy dey cain't come to meetin'. It seem like de mo' I preaches de mo' people ain't got time to come to church. I ain't hardly got enough members to fill up de choir. I gotta do de preachin' an' de bassin' too.

GOD : Is dat a fac' ?

NOAH : Yes, suh, brother. Everybody is mighty busy, gamblin', good-timin', an' goin' on. You jest wait, though. When Gabriel blow de horn you gonter fin' dey got plenty of time to punch chunks down in Hell. Yes, suh.

GOD : Seems a pity. Dey all perfec'ly healthy ?

NOAH : Oh, dey healthy, all right. Dey jest all lazy, and mean, and full of sin. You look like a preacher, too, brother.

GOD : Well, I am, in a way.

NOAH : You jest passin' through de neighbourhood ?

GOD : Yes. I wanted to see how things was goin' in yo' part of de country, an' I been feelin' jest 'bout de way you do. It's enough to discourage you.

NOAH : Yes, but I gotta keep wres'lin' wid 'em. Where You boun' for right now, brother ?

GOD : I was jest walkin' along. I thought I might stroll on to de nex' town.

NOAH : Well, dat's a pretty good distance. I live right yere. (*He stops walking.*) Why don' You stop an' give us de pleasure of Yo' com'pny for dinner ? I believe my ol' woman has kilt a chicken.

GOD : Why, dat's mighty nice of you, brother. I don' believe I caught yo' name.

NOAH : Noah, jest brother Noah. Dis is my home, brother. Come right in.

[GOD *and* NOAH *start walking towards Noah's house which is just coming into view on the treadmill. The stage darkens, the* CHOIR *sings "Feastin' Table," and when the lights go up again, the next scene is disclosed.*

SCENE VIII

Interior of NOAH'S *house. The ensemble suggests the combination living-dining room in a fairly prosperous Negro's cabin. Clean white curtains hang at the window. A table and chairs are in the centre of the room. There is a cheerful checked tablecloth on the table, and on the wall, a framed, highly coloured picture reading "God Bless Our Home."*

NOAH'S WIFE, *an elderly Negress, simply and neatly dressed,* GOD *and* NOAH *are discovered grouped about the table.*

NOAH : Company, darlin'. (*Noah's wife takes Noah's and God's* hats.) Dis gemman's a preacher, too. He's jest passin' through de country.

GOD : Good mo'nin', sister.

NOAH'S WIFE : Good mo'nin'. You jest ketch me when I'm gittin' dinner ready. You gonter stay with us ?

GOD : If I ain't intrudin'. Brother Noah suggested——

NOAH'S WIFE : You set right down yere. I got a chicken in de pot an' it'll be ready in 'bout five minutes. I'll go out de back an' call Shem, Ham 'n' Japheth. (*To* GOD.) Dey's our sons. Dey live right acrost de way but always have Sunday dinner wid us. You mens make yo'selves comf'table.

GOD : Thank you, thank you very kindly.

NOAH : You run along, we all right.

[GOD *and* NOAH *seat themselves.* NOAH'S WIFE *exits.*

GOD : You got a fine wife, Brother Noah.

NOAH : She pretty good woman.

GOD : Yes, suh, an' you got a nice little home. Have a ten cent seegar ? (GOD *offers him one.*)

NOAH : Thank you, much obliged.

[*Both men lean back restfully in their chairs.*

GOD : Jest what seems to be de main trouble 'mong mankind, Noah ?

NOAH : Well, it seems to me de main trouble is dat de whol' distric' is wide open. Now you know dat makes fo' loose livin'. Men folks spen's all dere time fightin', loafin' an' gamblin', an' makin' bad likker.

GOD : What about de women ?

NOAH : De women is worse dan de men. If dey ain't makin' love powder dey out beg, borrow an' stealin' money for policy tickets. Doggone, I come in de church Sunday 'fo' las' 'bout an' hour befo' de meeting was to start, and dere was a woman stealin' de altar cloth. She was goin' to hock it. Dey ain't got no moral sense. Now you take dat case las' month, over in East Putney. Case of dat young Willy Roback.

GOD : What about him ?

NOAH : Dere is a boy sebenteen years old. Doggone, if he didn't elope with his aunt. Now, you know, dat kin' of goin' on is bad fo' a neighborhood.

GOD : Terrible, terrible.

NOAH : Yes, suh. Dis use' to be a nice, decent community. I been doin' my best to preach de Word, but seems like every time I preach de place jest goes a little mo' to de dogs. De good Lawd only knows what's gonter happen.

GOD : Dat is de truth.

[*There is a pause. Each puffs his cigar.*

[*Suddenly* NOAH *grasps his knee, as if it were paining him, and twists his foot.*

NOAH : Huh !

GOD : What's de matter ?

NOAH : I jest got a twitch. My buck-aguer I guess. Every now and den I gets a twitch in de knee. Might be a sign of rain.

GOD : That's just what it is. Noah, what's de mos' rain you ever had 'round dese parts ?

NOAH : Well, de water come down fo' six days steady last April an' de ribber got so swole it bust down de levee up 'bove Freeport. Raise cain all de way down to de delta.

GOD : What would you say was it to rain for forty days and forty nights ?

NOAH : I'd say dat was a *complete* rain !

GOD : Noah, you don't know who I is, do you ?

NOAH (*puzzled*) : Yo' face looks easy, but I don't think I recall de name.

[GOD *rises slowly, and as he reaches his full height there is a crash of lightning, a moment's darkness, and a roll of thunder. It grows light again.* NOAH *is on his knees in front of* GOD.

I should have known You. I should have seen de glory.

GOD : Dat's all right, Noah. You didn't know who I was.

NOAH : I'm jes' ol' preacher Noah, Lawd, an' I'm Yo' servant. I ain' very much, but I'se all I got.

GOD : Sit down, Noah. Don' let Me hear you shamin' yo'se'f, caize yo' a good man. (*Timidly* NOAH *waits until* GOD *is seated, and then sits, himself.*) I jest wanted to fin' out if you was good, Noah. Dat's why I'm walkin' de earth in de shape of a natchel man. I wish dey was mo' people like you. But, far as I kin see you and yo' fam'ly is de only respectable people in de worl'.

NOAH : Dey jest all poor sinners, Lawd.

GOD : I know. I am your Lawd. I am a God of wrath and vengeance an' dat's why I'm gonter destroy dis worl'.

NOAH (*almost in a whisper. Drawing back*) : Jest as You say, Lawd.

GOD : I ain't gonter destroy you, Noah. You and yo' fam'ly, yo' sheep an' cattle, an' all de udder things dat ain't human I'm gonter preserve. But de rest is gotta go. (*Takes a pencil and a sheet of paper from His pocket.*) Look yere, Noah.

(NOAH *comes over and looks over His shoulder.*) I want you to build Me a boat. I want you to call it de " Ark," and I want it to look like dis. (*He is drawing on the paper. Continues to write as He speaks.*) I want you to take two of every kind of animal and bird dat's in de country. I want you to take seeds an' sprouts an' everythin' like dat an' put dem on dat Ark, because dere is gonter be all dat rain. Dey's gonter to be a deluge, Noah, an' dey's goin' to be a flood. De levees is gonter bust an' everything dat's fastened down is comin' loose, but it ain't gonter float long, caize I'm gonter make a storm dat'll sink everythin' from a hencoop to a barn. Dey ain't a ship on de sea dat'll be able to fight dat tempest. Dey all got to go. Everythin'. Everythin' in dis pretty worl' I made, except one thing, Noah. You an' yo' fam'ly an' de things I said are going to ride dat storm in de Ark. Yere's de way it's to be. (*He hands* NOAH *the paper.* NOAH *takes it and reads.*)

NOAH (*Pause. Looks at paper again*) : Yes, suh, dis seems to be complete. Now 'bout the animals, Lawd, You say You want everythin' ?

GOD : Two of everythin'.

NOAH : Dat would include jayraffes an' hippopotamuses ?

GOD : Everythin' dat is.

NOAH : Dey was a circus in town las' week. I guess I kin fin' dem. Co'se I kin git all de rabbits an' possums an' wil' turkeys easy. I'll sen' de boys out. Hum, I'm jest wonderin'——

GOD : 'Bout what ?

NOAH : 'Bout snakes ? Think You'd like snakes, too ?

GOD : Certainly, I want snakes.

NOAH : Oh, I kin git snakes, lots of 'em. Co'se, some of 'em's a little dangerous. Maybe I better take a kag of likker, too ?

GOD : You kin have a kag of likker.

NOAH *(musingly)* : Yes, suh, dey's a awful lot of differ'nt kin's of snakes, come to think about it. Dey's water moccasins, cotton-moufs, rattlers—mus' be a hund'ed kin's of other snakes down in de swamps. Maybe I better take two kags of likker.

GOD *(mildly)* : I think de one kag's enough.

NOAH : No. I better take two kags. Besides I kin put one on each side of de boat, an' balance de ship wid dem as well as havin' dem fo' medicinal use.

GOD : You kin put one kag in de middle of de ship.

NOAH *(buoyantly)* : Jes as easy to take de two kags, Lawd.

GOD : I think one kag's enough.

NOAH : Yes, Lawd, but You see forty days an' forty nights——

[*There is a distant roll of thunder.*

GOD *(firmly)* : One kag, Noah.

NOAH : Yes, Lawd. One kag.

[*The door in the back opens and* NOAH'S WIFE *enters with a tray of dishes and food.*

NOAH'S WIFE : Now, den, gen'lemen, if you'll jest draw up cheers.

[*The stage is darkened. The* CHOIR *is heard singing "I Want To Be Ready." They continue in the darkness until the lights go up on the next scene.*

SCENE IX

In the middle of the stage is the Ark. On the hillside, below the Ark, a dozen or more men and women, townspeople, are watching NOAH, SHEM, HAM *and* JAPHETH *on the deck of the Ark. The three sons are*

busily nailing boards on the cabin. NOAH *is smoking a pipe. He wears a silk hat, captain's uniform and a "slicker."*

NOAH (*to* SHEM) : You, Shem, tote up some ol' rough lumber, don' bring up any planed up lumber, caize dat ain't fo' de main deck.

SHEM : Pretty near supper time, daddy.

NOAH : Maybe 'tis, but I got de feelin' we ought to keep goin'.

FIRST WOMAN : You gonter work all night, Noah, maybe, huh ?

NOAH (*without looking at her*) : If de sperrit move me.

SECOND WOMAN : Look yere, Noah, whyn't you give up all dis damn foolishness ? Don' you know people sayin' yo' crazy ? What you think you doin' anyway ?

NOAH : I'se buildin' a Ark. (*Other men and women join those in the foreground.*) Ham, you better stop for a while 'n see whether dey bringin' de animals up all right. (*He looks at his watch.*) Dey ought to be pretty near de foot o' de hill by dis time ; if dey ain't you wait fo' dem and bring 'em yo'se'f.

[HAM *goes down a ladder at the side of the ship and exits during the following scene. The newcomers in group have been speaking to some of the early arrivals.*

SECOND WOMAN (*to* THIRD WOMAN, *one of the newcomers*) : No, you don't mean it !

THIRD WOMAN : I do so. Dat's what de talk is in de town.

FIRST MAN : You hear dat, Noah ? Dey say yo' ol' lady is tellin' everybody it's gonter rain fo' fo'ty days and fo'ty nights. You know people soon gonter git de idea you *all* crazy.

NOAH : Lot I keer what you think. (*To* JAPHETH.) Straighten up dem boards down dere, Japheth. (*Indicates floor of deck.*)

First Man (*to* Third Woman) : Was I you, I wouldn' go 'round with Mrs. Noah anymore, lady. Fust thing you know you'll be gittin' a hard name, too.

Third Woman : Don' I know ?

Second Woman : A lady cain't be too partic'lar dese days.

[Zeba *and* Flatfoot, *a tall, black, wicked-looking buck, enter, their arms around each other's waist.*

Zeba : Dere it is baby. Was I lyin' ?

Flatfoot : Well, I'll be split in two !

First Man : What you think of it, Flatfoot ?

Flatfoot : I must say ! Look like a house wit' a warpin' cellar.

Noah : Dis yere vessel is a boat.

Flatfoot : When I was a little boy dey used to build boats down near de ribber, where de water was.

[*The others laugh.*

Noah : Dis time it's been arranged to have de water come up to de boat. (Japheth *looks belligerently over the rail of the Ark at* Flatfoot. *To* Japheth.) Keep yo' shirt on, son.

Second Woman (*to* Third Woman) : Now, you see de whole fam'ly's crazy.

Third Woman : Listen, dey ain't gonter 'taminate me. It was me dat started resolvin' dem both out o' de buryin' society.

Zeba : When all dis water due up yere, Noah ?

Noah : You won't know when it gits yere, daughter.

Zeba : Is she goin' to be a side-wheeler, like de Bessy-Belle ?

Flatfoot : No ! If she was a side-wheeler she'd get her wheels all clogged wid sharks. She gonter

have jus' one great big stern wheel, like de Commodore. Den if dey ain't 'nuf water why de big wheel kin stir some up.

[*General laughter. Two or three of the* GAMBLERS *enter and join the group, followed by* CAIN THE SIXTH.

CAIN THE SIXTH : Dere's de fool an' his monument, jest like I said !

[*The* GAMBLERS *and* CAIN THE SIXTH *roar with laughter, slap their legs, etc., the members of the main group talk sotto voce to each other as* CAIN THE SIXTH *catches* ZEBA'S *eye.* FLATFOOT *is on her right and is not aware of* CAIN THE SIXTH'S *presence.*

NOAH : See how dey makin' out inside, son. (*Stops hammering.*)

[JAPHETH *exits into Ark.*

[NOAH *turns and gazes towards the east.*

CAIN THE SIXTH : Hello, honey.

ZEBA (*frightened but smiling*) : Hello, sugah.

CAIN THE SIXTH (*pleasantly*) : Ain' dat my ol' frien' Flatfoot wid you ?

ZEBA : Why, so 'tis ! (FLATFOOT *is now listening.*) (*To* FLATFOOT.) He's got a gun.

CAIN THE SIXTH : No, I ain't. (*He lifts his hands over his head.*)

ZEBA *quickly advances and runs her hands lightly over his pockets.*

ZEBA (*relieved*) : I guess he ain't.

CAIN THE SIXTH : No, I ain't got no gun for my ol' friend, Flatfoot.

[*He walks up to him.*

FLATFOOT (*smiling*) : Hi, Cain. How's de boy.

[CAIN *quickly presses his chest against* FLATFOOT'S, *his downstage arm sweeps around* FLATFOOT'S *body and his hand goes up to the small of* FLATFOOT'S *back.*

CAIN THE SIXTH (*quietly, but triumphantly*) : I got a little *knife* fo' *him.*

[FLATFOOT *falls dead.*

[*The laughter of the others stops and they look at the scene.* ZEBA *for a moment is terrified, her clenched hand pressed to her mouth. She looks at* CAIN THE SIXTH, *who is smiling at her. He tosses the knife on the ground and holds his hands out to her. She goes to him, smiling.*

ZEBA : You sho' take keer of me, honey.

CAIN THE SIXTH : Dat's caize I think yo' wo'th takin' keer of. (*To the others.*) It's all right, folks. I jest had to do a little cleanin' up.

FIRST WOMAN (*smiling*) *:* You is de quickes' scoundrel.

FIRST GAMBLER : It was a nice quick killin'. Who was he ?

SECOND WOMAN (*casually*) : Dey called him Flatfoot. From over de river. He wa'nt any good. He owed me for washin' for over a year.

THIRD WOMAN : Used to peddle muggles. Said it had a kick like reg'lar snow. Wasn't no good.

SECOND GAMBLER : Think we ought to bury him ?

FIRST MAN : No, just leave him dere. Nobody comes up yere, 'cept ol' Manatee.

[*Indicates* NOAH. *Cries of " Ol' Manatee ! Ol' Manatee, dat's good ! "*

NOAH (*still looking off*) : You bettah pray, you po' chillun.

(*They all laugh.*)

FIRST WOMAN : We bettah pray ? You bettah pray, Ol' Manatee ?

ZEBA : You bettah pray for rain. (*Laughter again.*)

NOAH : Dat's what I ain't doin', sinners. Shem ! Japheth ! (*To others, as he points off. Patters of rain.*) Listen !

CAIN THE SIXTH (*casually*) : Doggone, I believe it *is* gonter shower a little.

FIRST GAMBLER : It do looks like rain.

FIRST WOMAN : I think I'll git on home. I got a new dress on.

ZEBA : Me, too. I wants to keep lookin' nice fo' my sweet papa.

[*She pats* CAIN THE SIXTH'S *cheek.* CAIN THE SIXTH *hugs her.*

NOAH (*almost frantically*) : Ham ! Is de animals dere ?

HAM (*off stage*) : Yes, sir, dere yere. We're comin'.

NOAH : Den bring 'em on.

[SHEM *and* JAPHETH *come on deck with their hammers. The stage begins to darken.*

THIRD WOMAN : I guess we all might go home 'til de shower's over. Come on, papa.

SECOND GAMBLER : See you after supper, Noah. (*Crowd starts moving off R.*)

NOAH : God's gittin' ready to start, my sons. Let's git dis plankin' done.

ZEBA : Put a big Texas on it, Noah, an' we'll use it fo' excursions.

[*There is a distant roll of thunder, there are cries of "Good night, Admiral," "See you later," "So long, Manatee," as the crowd goes off. The thunder rumbles again. There is the sound of increasing rain. The hammers of* SHEM *and* JAPHETH *sound louder and are joined by the sounds of other hammerers. There is a flash of lightning. The* CHOIR *begins "Dey Ol' Ark's a-Movering," the sounds on the Ark become faster and louder. The rush of rain grows heavier.*)

NOAH : Hurry ! Hurry ! Where are you, Ham ?

HAM (*just off stage*) : Yere I am, father, wid de animals.

NOAH : God's give us His sign. Send 'em up de gangplank.

[*An inclined plane is thrown against the Ark from the side of the stage by* HAM, *who cracks a whip.*

HAM : Get on, dere.

[*The heads of two elephants are seen.*

NOAH : Bring 'em on board ! De Lawd is strikin' down de worl' !

[*The singing and the noises reach fortissimo as* HAM *cracks his whip again, and the rain falls on the stage.*

[*The stage is darkened. The* CHOIR *continues singing in the darkness.*

SCENE X

When the lights go up on scene, the Ark is at sea. Stationary waves run in front of it. The hillside has disappeared. The Ark is in the only lighted area. SHEM *is smoking a pipe on the deck, leaning on the rail. A steamboat whistle blows three short and one long blast.* SHEM *is surprised. In a moment* HAM *appears, also with a pipe, and joins* SHEM *at the rail.*

SHEM : Who'd you think you was signallin' ?

HAM : Dat wasn't me, dat was daddy.

SHEM : He think he gonter git a reply ?

HAM : I don' know. He's been gittin' a heap of comfort out of dat likker.

SHEM : De kag's nearly empty, ain't it ?

HAM : Pretty nearly almos'. (*They look over the rail. A pause.*) Seen anythin' ?

SHEM : Dis mornin' I seen somethin' over dere might a' been a fish.

HAM : Dat's de big news of de week.

SHEM : How long you think dis trip's gonter las' ?

HAM : I don' know ! Rain fo'ty days 'n' fo'ty nights an' when dat stop I thought sho' we'd come up ag'inst a san' bar o' somethin'. Looks now like all dat rain was jest a little incident of de trip. (*The whistle blows again.*) Doggone ! I wish he wouldn't do dat. Fust thing we know he'll wake up dem animals ag'in.

[JAPHETH *appears.*

SHEM : What de matter wit' de ol' man, Jape ?

JAPHETH : Doggone, he say he had a dream dat we're nearly dere. Dat's why he pullin' de whistle cord. See kin he git a' answer. (*He looks over the rail.*) Look to me like de same ol' territory.

[MRS. NOAH *appears on deck.*

NOAH'S WIFE : You boys go stop yo' paw pullin' dat cord. He so full of likker he think he's in a race.

JAPHETH : He claim he know what he's doin'.

NOAH'S WIFE : I claim he gittin' to be a perfec' nuisance. Me an' yo' wives cain't hardly heah ou'sel'es think. (NOAH *appears, his hat rakishly titled on his head. He goes to the railing and looks out.*) You 'spectin' company ?

NOAH : Leave me be, woman. De watah don' look so rough to-day. De ol' boat's ridin' easier.

NOAH'S WIFE : Ridin' like a ol' mule !

NOAH : Yes, suh, de air don't feel so wet. Shem ! 'Spose you sen' out 'nother dove. (SHEM *goes into the Ark.*) Ham, go git de soundin' line. Jape, keep yo' eye on de East.

[JAPHETH *goes to the end of the boat.*

NOAH'S WIFE : As fo' you, I s'pose you'll help things along by takin' a little drink.

NOAH : Look yere, who's de pilot of dis vessel ?

NOAH's WIFE : Ol' Mister Dumb Luck.

NOAH : Well, see dat's where you don' know anythin'.

NOAH's WIFE : I s'pose you ain't drunk as a fool ?

NOAH (*cordially*) : I feel congenial.

NOAH's WIFE : An' you look it. You look jest wonderful. I wonder if you'd feel so congenial if de Lawd was to show up ?

NOAH : De Lawd knows what I'm doin', don' you worry 'bout dat.

NOAH's WIFE : I wouldn't say anythin' ag'inst de Lawd. He suttinly let us know dey'd be a change in de weather. But I bet even de Lawd wonders sometimes why He ever put you in charge.

NOAH : Well, you let de Lawd worry 'bout dat.

[SHEM *appears with the dove.*

SHEM : Will I leave her go, Paw ?

NOAH : Leave 'er go.

[*There is a chorus of "Good Luck, Dove," from the group as the dove flies off stage.* HAM *appears with the sounding line.*

Throw 'er over, Boy.

[HAM *proceeds to do so.*

NOAH's WIFE : An' another thing——

HAM : Hey !

NOAH (*rushing to his side*) : What is it ?

HAM : Only 'bout a inch ! Look ! (*They lean over.*)

JAPHETH : It's gettin' light in de East.

[*As* HAM *works the cord up and down,* NOAH *and* NOAH's WIFE *turn toward* JAPHETH. *The* CHOIR *begins "My Soul Is a Witness for the Lord."*

NOAH : Praise de Lawd, so it is.

NOAH'S WIFE : Oh, dat's pretty.

NOAH (*to* HAM) : An' de boat's stopped. We've landed. Shem, go down 'n' drag de fires an' dreen de boiler. Yo go help 'im, Ham.

JAPHETH : Look, Paw.

[*The dove wings back to the Ark with an olive branch in its mouth.*

NOAH : 'N' yere's de little dove wid greenery in its mouth ! Take 'er down, Jape, so she kin tell de animals. (JAPHETH *exits after* SHEM *and* HAM, *carrying the dove. To* MRS. NOAH.) Now, maybe you feel little different.

NOAH'S WIFE (*contritely*) : It was jes' gittin' to be so tiresome. I'm sorry, Noah.

NOAH : Dat's all right, ol' woman. (NOAH'S WIFE *exits.* NOAH *looks about him. The lights have changed and the water piece is gone and the Ark is again on the hillside. Two mountains can be seen in the distance and a rainbow slowly appears over the Ark. The singing has grown louder.*) Thank you, Lawd, thank you very much indeed. Amen.

[*The singing stops with the "Amen."* GOD *appears on the deck.*

GOD : Yo' welcome, Noah.

[NOAH *turns and sees Him.*

NOAH : O, Lawd, it's wonderful.

GOD (*looking about him*) : I sort of like it. I like de way you handled de ship, too, Noah.

NOAH : Was You watchin', Lawd ?

GOD : Every minute. (*He smiles.*) Didn't de ol' lady light into you ?

NOAH (*apologetically*) : She was kinda restless.

GOD : That's all right. I ain't blamin' nobody. I don' even min' you' cussin' an' drinkin'. I

figure a steamboat cap'n on a long trip like you had has a right to a little redeye, jest so he don' go crazy.

NOAH : Thank You, Lawd. What's de orders now ?

GOD : All the animals safe ?

NOAH : Dey all fin' 'n' dandy, Lawd.

GOD : Den I want you to open dat starboard door, an' leave 'em all out. Let 'em go down de hill. Den you an' de family take all de seeds 'n' de sprouts an' begin plantin' ag'in. I'm startin' all over, Noah.

[NOAH *exits.* GOD *looks around.*

GOD : Well, now we'll see what happens. (GOD *listens with a smile, as noises accompanying the debarking of the animals are heard. There are the crack of whips, the voices of the men on the Ark, shouting "Git along dere," "Whoa, take it easy," "Duck yo' head," "Keep in line, dere," etc. Over the Ark there is a burst of centrifugal shadows, and the sound of a myriad of wings.* GOD *smiles at the shadows.*) Dat's right, birds, fin' yo' new homes. (*Bird twitters are heard again.* GOD *listens a moment and rests an arm on the railing. He speaks softly.*) Gabriel, kin you spare a minute ?

[GABRIEL *appears.*

GABRIEL : Yes, Lawd ?

[*The sounds from the other side of the Ark are by now almost hushed. The* LORD *indicates the new world with a wave of the hand.*

GOD : Well, it's did.

GABRIEL (*respectfully, but with no enthusiasm*) : So I take notice.

GOD : Yes, suh, startin' all over again.

GABRIEL : So I see.

GOD (*looking at him suddenly*) : Don' seem to set you up much.

GABRIEL : Well, Lawd, You see—(*he hesitates.*) 'Tain't none of my business.

GOD : What ?

GABRIEL : I say, I don' know very much about it.

GOD : I know you don'. I jest wanted you to see it. (*A thought strikes Him.*) Co'se, it ain' yo' business, Gabe. It's My business. 'Twas My idea. De whole thing was My idea. An' every bit of it's My business 'n' nobody else's. De whole thing rests on My shoulders. I declare, I guess *dat's* why I feel so solemn an' serious, at dis particklar time. You know *dis* thing's turned into quite a proposition.

GABRIEL (*tenderly*) : But, it's all right, Lawd, as You say, it's did.

GOD : Yes, suh, it's did. (*Sighs deeply. Looks slowly to the right and the left. Then softly.*) I only hope it's goin' to work out all right.

CURTAIN

PART II

Scene I

God's *Office again.*

Somewhere the Choir *is singing :* " *A City Called Heaven.*" *In the office are* Two Women Cleaners. *One is scrubbing the floor, the other dusting the furniture. The one dusting stops and looks out the window. There is a whirr and a distant faint boom.*

The Choir *stops.*

First Cleaner : Dat was a long way off.

Second Cleaner (*at window*) : Yes, ma'am. An' dat must a' been a big one. Doggone, de Lawd mus' be mad fo' sho', dis mo'nin'. Dat's de fo'ty-six' thunde'-bolt since breakfast.

First Cleaner : I wonder where at He's pitchin' dem.

Second Cleaner : My goodness, don' you know ?

First Cleaner (*a little hurt*) : Did I know I wouldn't ask de question.

Second Cleaner : Every one of dem's bound fo' de earth.

First Cleaner : De earth ? You mean dat little ol' dreenin' place ?

Second Cleaner : Dat's de planet. (*Another faint whirr and boom.*) Dere goes another.

First Cleaner : Well, bless me. *I* didn't know dey was thunde'bolts.

Second Cleaner : Wha'd you think dey was ?

First Cleaner (*above desk*) : I wasn't sho', but I thought maybe He might be whittlin' a new star o' two, an' de noise was jest de chips fallin'.

SECOND CLEANER : Carrie, where you been? Don' you know de earth is de new scandal? Ever'body's talkin' 'bout it.

FIRST CLEANER : Dey kep' it from me.

SECOND CLEANER : Ain't you noticed de Lawd's been unhappy lately?

FIRST CLEANER (*thoughtfully*) : Yeah, He ain't been His old self.

SECOND CLEANER : What did you think was de matteh? Lumbago?

FIRST CLEANER (*petulantly*) : I didn't know. I didn't think it was fo' me t'inquieh.

SECOND CLEANER : Well, it jest so happens dat de Lawd is riled as kin be by dat measly little earth. Or I should say de scum dat's on it.

FIRST CLEANER : Dat's mankind down here.

SECOND CLEANER : Dey mus' be scum, too, to git de Lawd so wukked up.

FIRST CLEANER : I s'pose so. (*Another whirr and boom.*) Looks like He's lettin' dem feel de wrath. Ain' dat a shame to plague de Lawd dat way?

SECOND CLEANER : From what I hear dey been beggin' fo' what dey're gittin'. My brother flew down to bring up a saint de other day and he say from what he see mos' of de population down dere has made de debbil king an' dey wukkin' in three shifts fo' him.

FIRST CLEANER : You cain't blame de Lawd.

SECOND CLEANER : Co'se you cain't. Dem human bein's 'd make anybody bile oveh. Ev'ry time de Lawd try to do sompin' fo' dem, doggone, if dey don't staht some new ruckus.

FIRST CLEANER : I take notice He's been wukkin' in yere mo' dan usual.

SECOND CLEANER : I wish He'd let us ladies fix it up. Wouldn't take a minute to make his desk gold-plated.

First Cleaner : I s'pose He likes it dis way. De Lawd's kind o' ol' fashioned in some ways. I s'pose He keeps dis office plain an' simple on purpose.

Second Cleaner (*finishing her work*) : I don' see why.

First Cleaner (*looking off*) : Well, it's kind of a nice place to come to when He's studyin' somethin' impo'tant. 'Most evahthin' else in heaven's so fin' 'n' gran', maybe ev'ry now an' den He jest gits sick an' tired of de glory. (*She is also collecting her utensils.*)

Second Cleaner : Maybe so. Jest de same I'd like to have a free hand wid dis place for a while, so's I could gold it up.

[God *appears in the doorway.*

God : Good mo'nin', daughters.

First and Second Cleaners : Good mo'nin', Lawd. We was jest finishin'.

God : Go ahead den, daughters. (*Goes to the window.*)

First and Second Cleaners : Yes, Lawd. (*They exeunt. Off stage.*) Good mo'nin', Gabriel.

[*Off stage* Gabriel *says,* "*Good mo'nin', sisters,*" *and enters immediately. He stands in the doorway for a moment watching* God—*a notebook and pencil in his hand.*

God : What's de total ?

Gabriel (*consulting the book*) : Eighteen thousand nine hund'ed an' sixty for de mo'nin'. Dat's includin' de village wid de fo'tune tellers. Dey certainly kin breed fast.

God (*solemnly*) : Dey displease Me. Dey displease Me greatly.

Gabriel : Want some more bolts, Lawd ?

God (*looking through window*) : Look at 'em dere.

Squirmin' an' fightin' an' bearin' false witness. Listen to dat liar, dere. He don' intend to marry that little gal. He don' even love her. What did you say?

GABRIEL : Should I got mo' bolts?

GOD : Wait a minute. (*He carefully points His finger down through the window.*) I'm goin' to git dat wicked man Myself. (*From a great distance comes an agonised cry : " Oh, Lawd ! "* GOD *turns from the window.*) No use gittin' mo' thunde-bolts. Dey don' do de trick. (*He goes to the swivel chair and sits.*) It's got to be somethin' else.

GABRIEL : How would it be if You was to doom 'em all ag'in, like dat time You sent down de flood? I bet dat would make dem mind.

GOD : You see how much good de flood did. Dere dey is, jest as bad as ever.

GABRIEL : How about cleanin' up de whole mess of 'em and sta'tin' all over ag'in wid some new kind of animal?

GOD : An' admit I'm licked?

GABRIEL (*ashamedly*) : No, of co'se not, Lawd.

GOD : No, suh. No, suh. Man is a kind of pet of mine and it ain't right fo' me to give up tryin' to do somethin' wid him. Doggone, mankin' *mus'* be all right at de core or else why did I ever bother wid him in de first place? (*Sits at desk.*)

GABRIEL : It's jest that I hates to see you worryin' about it, Lawd.

GOD : Gabe, dere ain't anythin' worth while anywheres dat didn't cause somebody some worryin'. I ain't never tol' you de trouble I had gittin' things started up yere. Dat's a story in itself. No, suh, de more I keep on bein' de Lawd de more I know I got to keep improvin' things. An' dat takes time and worry. De main trouble wid mankin' is he takes up so much of My time.

He ought to be able to help hisself a little. (*He stops suddenly and cogitates.*) Hey, dere ! I think I got it !

GABRIEL (*eagerly*) : What's de news ?

GOD (*still cogitating*) : Yes, suh, dat seems like an awful good idea.

GABRIEL : Tell me, Lawd.

GOD : Gabriel, have you noticed dat every now an' den, mankin' turns out some pretty good specimens ?

GABRIEL : Dat's de truth.

GOD : Yes, suh. Dey's ol' Abraham and Isaac an' Jacob an' all dat family.

GABRIEL : Dat's so, Lawd.

GOD : An' everyone of dem boys was a hard wukker an' a good citizen. We got to admit dat.

GABRIEL : Dey wouldn't be up yere flyin' wid us if dey hadn't been.

GOD : No, suh. An' I don' know but what de answer to de whole trouble is right dere.

GABRIEL : How You mean, Lawd ?

GOD : Why, doggone it, de good man is de man dat keeps busy. I mean I been goin' along on de principle dat he was somethin' like you angels—dat you ought to be able to give him somethin' an' den jest let him sit back an' enjoy it. Dat ain't so. Now dat I recollec' I put de first one down dere to take keer o' dat garden an' den I let him go ahead an' do nothin' but git into mischief. (*He rises.*) Sure, *dat's* it. He ain't *built* jest to fool 'roun' an' not do nothin'. Gabe, I'm gonter try a new scheme.

GABRIEL (*eagerly*) : What's de scheme, Lawd ?

GOD : I'll tell you later. Send in Abraham, Isaac an' Jacob. (*A voice outside calls : " Right away, Lawd."*) You go tell dem to put dem bolts back in de boxes. I ain' gonter use dem ag'in a while.

GABRIEL : O.K., Lawd.

GOD : Was you goin' anywhere near de Big Pit ?

GABRIEL : I could go.

GOD : Lean over de brink and tell Satan he's just a plain fool if he thinks he kin beat anybody as big as Me.

GABRIEL : Yes, suh, Lawd. Den I'll spit right in his eye. (GABRIEL *exits.*)

[GOD *looks down through the window again to the earth below.*

GOD : Dat new polish on de sun makes it powerful hot. (*He "r'ar back."*) Let it be jest a little bit cooler. (*He feels the air.*) Dat's nice. (*Goes to His desk. A knock on the door.*) Come in.

[ABRAHAM, ISAAC *and* JACOB *enter. All are very old men, but the beard of* ABRAHAM *is the longest and whitest, and they suggest their three generations. They have wings that are not quite so big as those of the native angels.*

ISAAC : Sorry we so long comin', Lawd. But Pappy and me had to take de boy (*pointing to* JACOB) over to git him a can of wing ointment.

GOD : What was de matter, son ?

JACOB : Dey was chafin' me a little. Dey fine now, thank you, Lawd.

GOD : Dat's good. Sit down an' make yo'selves comf'table. (*The three sit.* MEN : "*Thank you, Lawd.*") Men, I'm goin' to talk about a little scheme I got. It's one dat's goin' to affec' yo' fam'lies an' dat's why I 'cided I'd talk it over wid you, 'fo' it goes into ee-fect. I don' know whether you boys know it or not, but you is about de three best men of one fam'ly dat's come up yere since I made little apples. Now I tell you what I'm gonter do. Seein' dat you human bein's cain't 'preciate anythin' lessen

you fust wukk to git it and den keep strugglin' to hold it why I'm gonter turn over a very valuable piece of property to yo' fam'ly, and den see what kin dey do with it. De rest of de worl' kin go jump in de river fo' all I keer. I'm gonter be lookin' out fo' yo' descendants only. Now den, seein' dat you boys know de country pretty tho'ly, where at does you think is de choice piece of property in de whole worl' ? Think it over for a minute. I'm gonter let you make de s'lection.

ABRAHAM : If you was to ask me, Lawd, I don't think dey come any better dan de Land of Canaan.

GOD (*to* ISAAC *and* JACOB) : What's yo' feelin' in de matter ?

JACOB (*after a nod from* ISAAC) : Pappy an' me think do we get a pick, dat would be it.

GOD (*goes to window again ; looks out*) : De Land of Canaan. Yes, I guess dat's a likely neighbourhood. It's all run over wid Philistines and things right now, but we kin clean dat up. (*He turns from the window and resumes his seat.*) All right. Now who do you boys think is de best of yo' men to put in charge down dere ? You see I ain't been payin' much attention to anybody in particular lately.

ISAAC : Does you want de brainiest or de holiest, Lawd ? (MEN *look up.*)

GOD : I want de holiest. I'll make him brainy. (MEN *appreciate the miracle.*)

ISAAC (*as* ABRAHAM *and* ISAAC *nod to him*) : Well, if you want A Number One, goodness, Lawd, I don't know where you'll git more satisfaction dan in a great, great, great, great grandson of mine.

GOD : Where's he at ?

ISAAC : At de moment I b'lieve he's in de sheep

business over in Midian County. He got in a little trouble down in Egypt, but t'wan't his doin'. He killed a man dat was abusin' one of our boys in de brick works. Of co'se you know ol' King Pharaoh's got all our people in bondage.

GOD : I heard of it. (*With some ire.*) Who did you think put them dere? (*The visitors lower their heads.*) It's all right, boys. (*All rise.*) I'm gonter take dem out of it. An' I'm gonter turn over de whole Land of Canaan to dem. An' do you know whose gonter lead dem dere? Yo' great, great, great, great grandson. Moses, ain't it?

ISAAC : Yes, Lawd.

GOD (*smiling*) : Yes. I been noticin' *him.*

ABRAHAM : It's quite a favour fo' de fam'ly, Lawd.

GOD : Dat's why I tol' you. You see, it so happens I love yo' fam'ly, an' I delight to honour it. Dat's all, gen'lemen. (*The three others rise and cross to the door, murmuring, "Yes, Lawd," "Thank you, Lawd," "Much obliged, Lawd," etc. The* CHOIR *begins, "My Lord's A-Writin' All De Time" pianissimo.* GOD *stands watching the men leave.*) Enjoy yo'selves. (*He goes to the window. The singing grows softer. He speaks through the window to the earth.*) I'm comin' down to see you, Moses, an' dis time my scheme's *got* to wukk.

[*The stage is darkened. The singing grows louder and continues until the lights go up on the next scene.*

SCENE II

The tableau curtains frame the opening of a cave, which is dimly lighted. A large turkey-berry bush is somewhere near the foreground. MOSES *is seated on the grass eating his lunch from a basket in his lap.* ZIPPORAH, *his wife, stands watching him. He is about forty,* ZIPPORAH *somewhat younger. They*

are dressed inconspicuously. MOSES *stutters slightly when he speaks. He looks up to see* ZIPPORAH *smiling.*

MOSES : What you smilin' at, Zipporah ?

ZIPPORAH : Caize you enjoyin' yo'self.

MOSES : You is a good wife, Zipporah.

ZIPPORAH : You is a good husband, Moses. [MOSES *wipes his mouth with a handkerchief and begins putting into the basket the various implements of the meal which had been on the ground about him.* Why you suppose it's so dark here to-day ? Dey's no rain in de air.

MOSES : Seems like it's jest aroun' dis cave. Yo' father's house is got de sun on it. (*He looks in another direction.*) Looks all clear down toward Egypt.

ZIPPORAH : Co'se it *would* be fine weather in Egypt. De sky looks all right. Maybe it's gonter rain just right yere. Why don't you move de sheep over to de other pasture ?

MOSES (*a bit puzzled*) : I don' know. It got dark like dis befo' you come along wid de dinner an' I was gonter stop you on de top of de hill. Den somethin' kep' me yere.

ZIPPORAH : S'pose it could be de Lawd warnin' you dat dey's 'Gyptians hangin' 'roun' ?

MOSES : Dey may have fo'gotten all about dat killin' by now. Dey got a new Pharaoh down dere.

ZIPPORAH : An' I hear he's jest as mean to yo' people as his pappy was. I wouldn't put it pas' him to send soljahs all the way up yere fo' you.

MOSES : Dat's all right. De Lawd's looked after me so far, I don't 'spect Him to fall down on me now. You better be gittin' home.

ZIPPORAH (*taking the basket*) : I'll be worryin' about you.

MOSES (*kissing her and then smiling*) : 'Parently de Lawd ain't. He knows I'm safe as kin be. Lemme see you feel dat way.

ZIPPORAH : You is a good man, Moses.

MOSES : I's a lucky man. (ZIPPORAH *exits with the basket.* MOSES *looks up at the sky.*) Dat's funny. De sun seems to be shinin' everyplace but right yere. It's shinin' on de sheep. Why ain't dey no cloud dere ?

GOD (*off stage*) : Caize I want it to be like dat, Moses.

MOSES (*looking about him*) : Who's dat ?

GOD (*off stage again*) : I'm de Lawd, Moses.

MOSES (*smiling*) : Dat's what you say. Dis yere shadow may be de Lawd's wukk, but dat voice soun' pretty much to me like my ol' brother Aaron.

GOD (*off stage*) : Den keep yo' eyes open, son. (*The turkey-berry bush begins to glow and then turns completely round.* MOSES *looks at it fascinated.*) Maybe you notice de bush ain't burnin' up.

MOSES : Dat's de truth.

[MOSES *is full of awe but not frightened.*

GOD (*off stage*) : Now you believe Me ?

MOSES : Co'se I does. It's wonderful.

[*The light in the bush dies and* GOD *appears from behind it.*

GOD : No, it ain't, Moses. It was jest a trick.

MOSES : 'Scuse me doubtin' You, Lawd. I always had de feelin' You wuz takin' keer of me, but I never 'spected You'd fin' de time to talk wid me pussunly. (*He laughs.*) Dat was a good trick, Lawd. I'se seen some good ones, but dat was de beatenest.

GOD : Yo' gonter see lots bigger tricks dan dat, Moses. In fac', yo' gonter perfo'm dem.

Moses (*incredulously*) : Me? I'm gonter be a tricker?

God : Yes, suh.

Moses : An' do magic? Lawd, my mouth ain't got de quick talk to go wid it.

God : It'll come to you now.

Moses (*now cured of stuttering*) : Is I goin' wid a circus?

God (*slowly and solemnly*) : Yo' is goin' down into Egypt, Moses, and lead My people out of bondage. To do dat I'm gonter make you de bes' tricker in de worl'.

Moses (*a little frightened*) : Egypt! You know I killed a man dere, Lawd. Won't dey kill me?

God : Not when dey see yo' tricks. You ain't skeered, is you?

Moses (*simply and bravely*) : No, suh, Lawd.

God : Den yere's what I'm gonter do. Yo' people is My chillun, Moses. I'm sick and tired o' de way ol' King Pharaoh is treatin' dem, so I'se gonter take dem away, and yo' gonter lead dem. You gonter lead 'em out of Egypt an' across de River Jordan. It's gonter take a long time, and you ain't goin' on no excursion train. Yo' gonter wukk awful hard for somethin' yo' goin' to fin' when de trip's over.

Moses : What's dat, Lawd?

God : It's de Land of Canaan. It's de bes' land I got. I've promised it to yo' people, an' I'm gonter give it to dem.

Moses : Co'se, ol' King Pharaoh will do everything he kin to stop it.

God : Yes, an' dat's where de tricks come in. Dey tell Me he's awful fond of tricks.

Moses : I hear dat's *all* he's fon' of. Dey say if you can't take a rabbit out of a hat you cain't even git in to see him.

GOD : Wait'll you see de tricks you an' Me's goin' to show him.

MOSES (*delightedly*) : Doggone ! Huh, Lawd ?

GOD : Yes, suh. Now de first trick——

[GOD *is lifting a stick which He carries.*

MOSES : Jest a minute, Lawd. (GOD *halts the demonstration.*) I'm gonter learn de tricks and do just like you tell me, but I *know* it's gonter take me a little time to learn all dat quick talkin'. Cain't I have my brother Aaron go wid me ? He's a good man.

GOD : I was gonter have him help you wid de Exodus. I guess he can watch, too.

MOSES : I'll call 'im. (*He turns as if to shout.*)

GOD : Wait. (MOSES *turns and looks at* GOD.) I'll *bring* him. (*Softly.*) Aaron !

[AARON *appears between* GOD *and* MOSES *in the mouth of the cave. He is a little taller than* MOSES *and slightly older. He, too, is dressed like a field hand.*

AARON (*blankly*) : Hey !

[MOSES *goes to him, takes his hand and leads him, bewildered down to where* MOSES *had been standing alone.* AARON *then sees* GOD.

MOSES (*almost in a whisper*) : It's all right.

GOD : Don't worry, son, I'm jest showin' some tricks. Bringin' you yere was one of em. (AARON *stares at* GOD *as if hypnotized.*) Now den, you see dis yere rod ? Looks like a ordinary walking stick, don' it ?

MOSES : Yes, Lawd.

GOD : Well, it ain't no ordinary walkin' stick, caize look. (MOSES *leans forward.*) When I lays it down on de groun'——

[*The stage is darkened. The* CHOIR *begins,* " *Go Down, Moses,*" *and continues until the lights go up on the next scene.*

Scene III

The throne room of Pharaoh. *It suggests a Negro lodge room. The plain board walls are coloured by several large parade banners of varying sizes, colours and materials, bordered with gold fringe and tassels on them. Some of the inscriptions on them read :*

Sublime Order of Princes of the House of Pharaoh Home Chapter

Mystic Brothers of the Egyptian Home Guard Ladies Auxiliary, No. 1

Supreme Magicians and Wizards of the Universe

Private Flag of His Honour Old King Pharaoh

Royal Young People's Pleasure Club

Enchanted and Invisible Cadets of Egypt Boys' Brigade

There is one door up right and a window. The throne, an ordinary armchair with a drapery over its back, is on a dais. Pharaoh *is seated on the throne. His crown and garments might be those worn by a high officer in a Negro lodge during a ritual. About the throne itself are high officials, several of them with plumed hats, clothing that suggests military uniforms, and rather elaborate sword belts, swords and scabbards A few soldiers carrying spears are also in his neighbourhood and one or two bearded ancients in brightly coloured robes with the word " Wizard " on their conical hats. In the general group of men and women scattered elsewhere in the room Sunday finery is noticeable everywhere. Most of the civilians have bright " parade " ribbons and wear medals. In a cleared space immediately before the throne a* Candidate Magician *is performing a sleight-of-hand trick with cards.* Pharaoh *watches him apathetically. He is receiving earnest attention from a few of the others, but the majority of the men and women are talking*

quietly among themselves. Beside the CANDIDATE MAGICIAN *are several paraphernalia of previously demonstrated tricks.*

CANDIDATE MAGICIAN (*holding up some cards*) : Now den' ol' King Pharaoh, watch dis' (*He completes a trick. There is a murmur of "Not bad," "Pretty good," etc. from a few of the watchers.* PHARAOH *makes no comment.*) Now, I believe de cyard I ast you to keep sittin' on was de trey of diamonds, wasn't it?

PHARAOH : Yeah.

CANDIDATE MAGICIAN : Den kin I trouble you to take a look at it now? (PHARAOH *half rises to pick up a card he has been sitting on, and looks at it.*) I believe you'll now notice dat it's de king of clubs? (PHARAOH *nods and shows the card to those nearest him. The* CANDIDATE MAGICIAN *waits for an audible approval and gets practically none.*) An' dat, ol' King Pharaoh, completes de puffohmance.

[*An elderly man in a uniform steps forward.*

GENERAL : On behalf of my nephew I beg Yo' Honour to let him jine de ranks of de royal trickers and magicians.

PHARAOH (*to the two* WIZARDS) : What do de committee think? (*The* WIZARDS *shake their heads.*) Dat's what I thought. He ain't good enough. I'd like to help you out, General, but you know a man's got to be a awful good tricker to git in de royal society dese days. You better go back an' steddy some mo', son. (*He lifts his voice and directs two soldiers guarding the door.*) Is de Head Magician reached de royal waitin' room yit? (*One of the soldiers opens the door to look out.*) If he is, send him in.

[*The* SOLDIERS *beckons to some one off stage, throws the door open, and announces to the court.*

SOLDIER : De Head Magician of de land of Egypt.

[*A very old and villainous man enters. His costume is covered with cabalistic and zodiacal signs. He advances to the King, the other magician and his uncle making way for him. He bows curtly to* PHARAOH.

HEAD MAGICIAN : Good mo'nin', ol' King Pharaoh.

PHARAOH : Mo'nin', Professor. What's de news ?

HEAD MAGICIAN : Evahthing's bein' carried out like you said.

PHARAOH : How's de killin' of de babies 'mongst de Hebrews comin' 'long ?

HEAD MAGICIAN : Jes' like you ordered.

PHARAOH (*genially*) : Dey killed all of 'em, huh ?

HEAD MAGICIAN : Do dey see one, dey kill 'im. You teachin' 'em a great lesson. Dey don' like it a-tall.

PHARAOH (*smiling*) : What do dey say ?

HEAD MAGICIAN (*pawing the air inarticulately*) : I hates to tell in front of de ladies.

PHARAOH : Dey feels pretty bad, huh ?

HEAD MAGICIAN : Dat's jest de beginnin' of it. Betwixt de poleece and de soljahs we killed about a thousan' of 'em las' night. Dat's purty good.

PHARAOH (*thoughtfully*) : Yeh, it's fair. I guess you boys is doin' all you kin. But I fin' I ain't satisfied, though.

HEAD MAGICIAN : How you mean, Yo' Honor ?

PHARAOH : I mean I'd like to make dose Hebrew chillun realize dat I kin be even mo' of a pest. I mean I hates dem chillun. An' I'm gonter think of a way of makin' 'em even mo' mizzable.

HEAD MAGICIAN : But dey *ain't* anythin' meaner dan killin' de babies, King.

PHARAOH : Dey must be sump'n. Doggone, you is my head tricker, you put yo' brains on it. (*To the others.*) Quiet, whilst de Head Magician go into de silence.

HEAD MAGICIAN (*after turning completely around twice, and a moment's cogitation*) : I tell you what I kin do. All de Hebrews dat ain't out to de buryin' grounds or in de hospitals is labourin' in de brick wukks.

PHARAOH : Yeh ?

HEAD MAGICIAN (*after a cackling laugh*) : How would it be to take de straw away from 'em and tell 'em dey's got to turn out jest as many bricks as usual ? Ain't dat nasty ?

PHARAOH : Purty triflin', but I s'pose it'll have to do for de time bein'. Where's de extreme inner guard ? (*One of the military attendants comes forward.*) Go on out an' tell de sup'intendent to put dat into ee-ffect. (*The attendant bows and starts for the door. He stops as* PHARAOH *calls to him.*) Wait a minute ! Tell 'im to chop off de hands of anybody dat say he cain't make de bricks dat way. (*The attendant salutes and exits, the door being opened and closed by one of the soldiers.*) Now what's de news in de magic line ?

HEAD MAGICIAN : I ain't got very many novelties to-day, King, I bin wukkin' too hard on de killin's. I'm so tired I don't believe I could lift a wand.

[*There are murmurs of protest from the assemblage.*

PHARAOH : Doggone, you was to 'a been de chief feature o' de meetin' dis mawnin'. Look at de turn-out you got account of me tellin' 'em you was comin'.

HEAD MAGICIAN : Well, dat's de way it is, King. Why don' you git de wizards to do some spell castin' ?

PHARAOH : Dey say it's in de cyards dat dey cain't wukk till high noon. (*He glances at the* WIZARDS.) Think mebbe you kin cheat a little ?

FIRST WIZARD : Oh, dat cain't be done, King.

PHARAOH : Well, we might as well adjourn, den. Looks to me like de whole program's shot to pieces. (*He starts to rise, when there is a furious banging on the door.*) What's de idea, dere ? See who dat is. (*The soldiers open the door.* MOSES *and* AARON *enter, pushing the two soldiers aside and coming down in front of* PHARAOH. *The soldiers are bewildered and* PHARAOH *is angry.*) Say, who tol' you two baboons you could come in yere ?

MOSES : Is you ol' King Pharaoh ?

PHAROAH : Dat's me. Did you heah what I asked you ?

MOSES : My name is Moses, and dis is my brother Aaron.

[*Murmur of "Hebrews" spreads through the room.*

PHARAOH (*in a rage*) : Is you Hebrews ?

MOSES : Yes, suh.

PHARAOH (*almost screaming*) : Put 'em to de sword !

[*As the courtiers approach,* AARON *suddenly discloses the rod, which he swings once over his head. The courtiers draw back as if their hands had been stung. Cries of "Hey !" "Lookout," etc.*

MOSES : Keep outside dat circle.

[*The courtiers nearest* MOSES *and* AARON *look at each other, exclaiming ad lib., "Did you feel dat ?" "What is dat ?" "What's goin' on, heah ?" "My hands is stingin' !" etc.*

PHARAOH (*puzzled but threatening*) : What's de idea yere ?

MOSES : We is magicians, ol' King Pharaoh.

PHARAOH (*to the* HEAD MAGICIAN) : Put a spell on 'em. (*The* HEAD MAGICIAN *stands looking at them bewildered. To* MOSES.) I got some magicians too. We'll see who's got de bes' magic. (MOSES *and* AARON *laugh. Most of the courtiers are cowering. To the* HEAD MAGICIAN.) Go ahead, give 'em gri-gri.

MOSES : Sure, go ahead.

PHARAOH : Hurry up, dey's laughin' at you. What's de matter ?

HEAD MAGICIAN : I cain't think of de right spell.

PHARAOH (*now frightened himself*) : You mean dey got even *you* whupped ?

HEAD MAGICIAN : Dey's got a new kind of magic.

PHARAOH (*gazes at* HEAD MAGICIAN *a moment, bewildered. To the* WIZARDS.) I s'pose if de Professor cain't, you cain't.

FIRST WIZARD : Dat's a new trick, King.

HEAD MAGICIAN (*rubbing his fingers along his palms*) : It's got 'lectricity in it !

PHARAOH : Hm, well dat may make it a little diff'rent. So you boys is magicians, too ?

MOSES : Yes, suh.

PHARAOH : Well, we's always glad to see some new trickers in de co't, dat is if dey good. (*He glances about him.*) You look like you is O.K.

MOSES : Dat's what we claims, ol' King Pharaoh. We think we's de best in de worl'.

PHARAOH : You certainly kin talk big. Jest what is it you boys would like ?

MOSES : We came to show you some tricks. Den we's goin' to ask you to do somethin' for us.

PHARAOH : Well, I s'pose you know I'm a fool for conjurin'. If a man kin show me some tricks I ain't seen, I goes out of my way to do him a favour.

MOSES : Dat's good. Want to see de first trick ?

PHARAOH : It ain't goin' to hurt nobody ?

MOSES : Dis one won't.

PHARAOH : Go ahead.

MOSES : Dis yere rod my brother has looks jes' like a walkin' stick, don't it ?

[*The courtiers now join the King in interest.*

PHARAOH : Uh huh. Le's see.

[AARON *hands him the rod, which* PHARAOH inspects and returns.

MOSES : Well, look what happens when he lays it on de groun'.

[AARON *places the rod on the second step of the throne. It turns into a lifelike snake. There are exclamations from the assemblage.*

PHARAOH : Dat's a good trick ! Now turn it back into a walkin' stick again. (AARON *picks it up and it is again a rod. Exclamations of " Purty good ! " " Dat's all right ! " " What do you think of that ! " etc.*) Say, you is good trickers !

MOSES : You ain't never seen de beat of us. Now I'm goin' to ask de favor.

PHARAOH : Sure, what is it ?

MOSES (*solemnly*) : Let de Hebrew chillun go !

PHARAOH (*rises and stares at them. There is a murmur of " Listen to 'im ! " " He's got nerve ! " " I never in my life ! " " My goodness ! " etc.*) What did you say ?

MOSES : Let de Hebrew chillun go.

[PHARAOH *seats himself again.*

PHARAOH (*slowly*) : Don' you know de Hebrews is my slaves ?

MOSES : Yes, suh.

PHARAOH : Yes, suh, my slaves. (*There is a distant groaning.*) Listen, and you kin hear 'em bein' treated like slaves. (*He calls toward the window.*) Wat was dey doin' den ?

MAN NEAR THE WINDOW : Dey's jest gettin' de news down in de brick-yard.

PHARAOH : I won't let them go. (*He snorts contemptuously.*) Let's see another trick.

MOSES : Yes, suh, yere's a better one. (*He lowers his head.*) Let's have a plague of de flies.

[AARON *raises the rod. The room grows dark and a great buzzing of flies is heard. The courtiers break out in cries of* " *Get away fum me !* " " *Take 'em away !* " " *De place is filled with flies !* " " *Dis is terrible !* " " *Do sump'n, Pharaoh !* "

PHARAOH (*topping the others*) : All right—stop de trick !

MOSES : Will you let de Hebrews go ?

PHARAOH : Sho' I will. Go ahead, stop it !

MOSES (*also above the others*) : Begone !

[*The buzzing stops and the room is filled with light again, as* AARON *lowers the rod. All except* MOSES *and* AARON *are brushing the flies from their persons.*

PHARAOH (*laughing*) : Doggone, dat was a good trick ! (*The others, seeing they are uninjured, join in the laughter, with exclamations of* " *Doggone !* " " *You all right ?* " " *Sho' I'm all right.*" " *Didn't hurt me,*" *etc.*) You *is* good trickers.

MOSES : Will you let de Hebrew chillun go ?

PHARAOH (*sitting down again*) : Well, I'll tell you, boys. I'll tell you sump'n you didn't know. You take me, *I'm* a pretty good tricker, an' I jest outtricked you. So, bein' de bes' tricker, I don't think I will let 'em go. You got any mo' tricks yo'self ?

MOSES : Yes, suh. Dis is a little harder one. (AARON *lifts the rod.*) Gnats in de mill pon', gnats in de clover, gnats in de tater patch, stingin' all over.

[*The stage grows dark again. There is the humming of gnats and the slapping of hands against faces and arms, and the same protests as were heard with the flies, but with more feeling,* " *I'm gittin' stung to death !* " " *I'm all stung !* " " *Dey're like hornets !* " " *Dey's on my face !* " *etc.*

PHARAOH : Take 'em away, Moses !

MOSES (*his voice drowning the others*) : If I do, will you let 'em go ?

PHARAOH : Sho' I will, dis time.

MOSES : Do you mean it ?

PHARAOH : Co'se I mean it ! Doggone, one just stang me on de nose.

MOSES : Begone ! (*lights come up as* AARON *lowers the rod. There is a moment of general recovery again.* PHARAOH *rubs his nose, looks at his hands, etc., as do the others.*) Now, how about it ?

PHARAOH (*smiling*) : Well, I'll tell you, Moses. Now dat de trick's over——

[MOSES *takes a step toward* PHARAOH.

MOSES : Listen, Pharaoh. You been lyin' to me, and I'm gittin' tired of it.

PHARAOH : I ain't lyin', I'm trickin', too. You been trickin' me and I been trickin' you.

MOSES : I see. Well, I got one mo' trick up my sleeve which I didn't aim to wukk unless I had to. Caize when I does it, I cain't undo it.

PHARAOH : Wukk it an' I'll trick you right back. I don't say you ain't a good tricker, Moses. You is one of de best I ever seen. But I kin outtrick you. Dat's all.

MOSES : It ain't only me dat's goin' to wukk dis trick. It's me an' de Lawd.

PHARAOH : Who ?

MOSES : De Lawd God of Israel.

PHARAOH : I kin outtrick you an' de Lawd too !

MOSES (*angrily*) : Now you done it, ol' King Pharaoh. You been mean to de Lawd's people, and de Lawd's been easy on you caize you didn't know no better. You been givin' me a lot of say-so and no do-so, and I didn' min' dat. But now you've got to braggin' dat you's better dan de Lawd, and dat's too many.

PHARAOH You talk like a preacher, an' I never did like to hear preachers talk.

MOSES : You ain't goin' to like it any better, when I strikes down de oldes' boy in every one of yo' people's houses.

PHARAOH : Now you've given up trickin' and is jest lyin'. (*He rises.*) Listen. I'm Pharaoh. I do de strikin' down yere. I strike down my enemies, and dere's no one in all Egypt kin kill who he wants to, 'ceptin' me.

MOSES : I'm sorry, Pharaoh. Will you let de Hebrews go ?

PHARAOH : You heard my word. (AARON *is lifting his rod again at a signal from* MOSES.) Now, no more tricks or I'll——

MOSES : Oh, Lawd, you'll have to do it, I guess. Aaron, lift de rod.

[*There is a thunderclap, darkness and screams. The lights go up. Several of the younger men on the stage have fallen to the ground or are being held in the arms of the horrified elders.*

PHARAOH : What have you done yere ? Where's my boy ?

[*Through the door come four men bearing a young man's body.*

FIRST OF THE FOUR MEN : King Pharaoh.

[PHARAOH *drops into his chair, stunned, as the dead boy is brought to the throne.*

PHARAOH (*grief-stricken*) : Oh, my son, my fine son.

[*The courtiers look at him with mute appeal.*

MOSES : I'm sorry, Pharaoh, but you cain't fight de Lawd. Will you let His people go ?

PHARAOH : Let them go.

[*The lights go out. The* CHOIR *begins, " Mary Don't You Weep," and continues until it is broken*

by the strains of "I'm Noways Weary and I'm Noways Tired." The latter is sung by many more voices than the former, and the cacophony ends as the latter grows in volume and the lights go up on the next scene.

Scene IV

The Children of Israel *are marching on the treadmill and now singing fortissimo. They are of all ages and most of them are ragged. The men have packs on their shoulders, one or two have hand carts. The line stretches across the stage. It is nearing twilight, and the faces of the assemblage are illumined by the rays of the late afternoon sun. The upper treadmill carries a gradually rising and falling middle distance past the marchers. The foot of a mountain appears; a trumpet call is heard as the foot of the mountain reaches stage centre. The marchers halt. The picture now shows the mountain running up out of sight off right. The singing stops. A babel of "What's de matter?" "Why do we stop?" "Tain't sundown yet!" "What's happened?" "What's goin' on?" "What are they blowin' for?" etc. Those looking ahead begin to murmur. "It's Moses," "Moses." "What's happened to him?" The others take up the repetition of "Moses," and* Moses *enters, on the arm of* Aaron. *He is now an old man, as is his brother, and he totters toward the centre of the stage. Cries of "What's de matter, Moses?" "You ain't hurt, is you?" "Ain't that too bad?" etc. He slowly seats himself on the rock at the foot of the mountain.*

Aaron: How you feelin' now, brother?

Moses: I'm so weary, Aaron. Seems like I was took all of a sudden.

Aaron: Do we camp yere?

Moses (*pathetically*): No, you got to keep goin'.

Aaron: But you cain't go no further to-night, brother.

MOSES : Dis never happened to me befo'.

A YOUNG WOMAN : But you's a ol' man, now, Father Moses. You cain't expect to go as fas' as we kin.

MOSES : But de Lawd said I'd do it. He said I was to show you de Promised Land. Fo'ty years, I bin leadin' you. I led you out o' Egypt. I led you past Sinai, and through the wilderness. Oh, I cain't fall down on you now !

AARON : Le's res' yere fo' de night. Den we'll see how you feel in de mo'nin'.

MOSES : We tol' de scouts we'd meet 'em three miles furder on. I hate fo' 'em to come back all dis way to report. 'Tis gettin' a little dark, ain't it ?

AARON : It ain't dark, brother.

MOSES : No, it's my eyes.

AARON : Maybe it's de dust.

MOSES : No, I jest cain't seem to see. Oh, Lawd, dey cain't have a blind man leadin' 'em ! Where is you, Aaron ?

AARON : I'se right yere, Moses.

MOSES : Do you think—— (*Pause.*) Oh ! Do you think it's de time He said ?

AARON : How you mean, Moses ?

[*Crowd look from one to another in wonder.*

MOSES : He said I could lead 'em to de Jordan, dat I'd *see* de Promised Land, and dat's all de further I could go, on account I broke de laws. Little while back I thought I *did* see a river ahead, and a pretty land on de other side.

(*Distant shouts of " Hooray ! " " Yere dey are ! " " Dey travelled quick," etc.*) Where's de young leader of de troops ? Where's Joshua ?

[*The call " Joshua " is taken up by those on the right of the stage, followed almost immediately by " Yere he is ! " " Moses wants you ! " etc.*

[JOSHUA *enters. He is a fine looking Negro of about thirty.*

JOSHUA (*going to* MOSES' *side*) : Yes, suh.

MOSES : What's de shoutin' 'bout, Joshua ?

JOSHUA : De scouts is back wid de news. De Jordan is right ahead of us, and Jericho is jest on de other side. Moses, we're dere ! (*There are cries of "Hallelujah !" "De Lawd be praised !" "Hooray !" "De Kingdom's comin' !" etc. With a considerable stir among the marchers, several new arrivals crowd in from right, shouting, "Moses, we're dere !"* JOSHUA *seeing the new-comers.*) Yere's de scouts !

[*Three very ragged and dusty young men advance to* MOSES.

MOSES (*as the shouting dies*) : So it's de River Jordan ?

FIRST SCOUT : Yes, suh.

MOSES : All we got to take is de City of Jericho.

FIRST SCOUT : Yes, suh.

MOSES : Joshua, you got to take charge of de fightin' men, an' Aaron gotta stay by de priests.

JOSHUA : What about you ?

MOSES : You are leavin' me behind. Joshua, you gonter get de fightin' men together and take dat city befo' sundown.

JOSHUA : It's a big city, Moses, wid walls all 'round it. We ain't got enough men.

MOSES : You'll take it, Joshua.

JOSHUA : Yes, suh, but how ?

MOSES : Move up to de walls wid our people. Tell de priests to go wid you with de rams' horns. You start marchin' 'round dem walls, and den—

JOSHUA : Yes, suh.

MOSES : De Lawd'll take charge, jest as He's

took charge ev'y time I've led you against a city. He ain't never failed, has He?

SEVERAL VOICES: No, Moses. (*All raise their heads.*)

MOSES: And He ain't goin' to fail us now (*He prays. All bow.*) Oh, Lawd, I'm turnin' over our brave young men to You, caize I know You don' want me to lead 'em any further. (*Rises.*) Jest like You said, I've got to de Jordan but I cain't get over it. An' yere dey goin' now to take de City of Jericho. In a little while dey'll be marchin' 'roun' it. An' would You please be so good as to tell 'em what to do? Amen. (*To* JOSHUA.) Go ahead. Ev'ybody follows Joshua now. Give de signal to move on wid e'vything. (*A trumpet is heard.*) You camp fo' de night in de City of Jericho.

[MOSES *seats himself on the rock.*

JOSHUA: Cain't we help you, Moses?

MOSES: You go ahead. De Lawd's got His plans fo' me. Soun' de signal to march. (*Another trumpet call is heard. The company starts marching off.* AARON *lingers a moment.*) Take care of de Ark of de Covenant, Aaron.

AARON: Yes, brother. Good-bye.

MOSES: Good-bye, Aaron. (*The singing is resumed softly and dies away. The last of the marchers has disappeared.*) Yere I is, Lawd. De chillun is goin' into de Promised Land. (GOD *enters from behind the hill. He walks to* MOSES, *puts His hands on his shoulders.*) You's with me, ain't You, Lawd?

GOD: Co'se I is.

MOSES: Guess I'm through, Lawd. Jes like You said I'd be, when I broke de tablets of de law. De ol' machine's broke down.

GOD: Jest what was it I said to you, Moses? Do you remember?

MOSES : You said I couldn't go into de Promised Land.

GOD : Dat's so. But dat ain't all dey was to it.

MOSES : How You mean, Lawd ?

GOD : Moses, you been a good man. You been a good leader of My people. You got Me angry once, dat's true. And when you anger Me I'm a God of Wrath. But I never meant you wasn't gonter have what was comin' to you. An' I ain't goin' to do you out of it, Moses. It's jest de country acrost de River dat you ain't gonter enter. You gonter have a Promised Land. I been gettin' it ready fo' you, fo' a long time. Kin you stand up ?

MOSES (*rising, with* GOD'S *help*) : Yes, suh, Lawd.

GOD : Come on, I'm goin' to show it to you. We goin' up dis hill to see it. Moses, it's a million times nicer dan de Land of Canaan. (*They start up the hill.*)

MOSES : I cain't hardly see.

GOD : Don't worry. Dat's jest caize you so old.

[*They take a step or two up the hill, when* MOSES *stops suddenly.*

MOSES : Oh !

GOD : What's de matter ?

MOSES : We cain't be doin' dis !

GOD : Co'se we kin !

MOSES : But I fo'got ! I fo'got about Joshua and de fightin' men !

GOD : How about 'em ?

MOSES : Dey're marchin' on Jericho. I tol' 'em to march aroun' de walls and den de Lawd would be dere to tell 'em what to do.

GOD : Dat's all right. He's dere.

MOSES : Den who's dis helpin' me up de hill ?

GOD : Yo' faith, yo' God.

MOSES : And is You over dere helpin' them too, Lawd ? Is You goin' to tell dem poor chillun what to do ?

GOD : Co'se I is. Listen, Moses. I'll show you how I'm helpin' dem.

[*From the distance comes the blast of the rams' horns, the sound of crumbling walls, a roar, and a moment's silence. The* CHOIR *begins "Joshua Fit De Battle of Jericho" and continues through the rest of the scene.*

MOSES : You did it, Lawd ! You've tooken it ! Listen to de chillun—dey's in de Land of Canaan at last ! You's de only God dey ever was, ain't You, Lawd ?

GOD (*quietly*) : Come on, ol' man. (*They continue up the hill.*)

[*The stage is darkened.*

MR. DESHEE (*in the dark*) : But even dat scheme didn't work. Caize after dey got into the Land of Canaan dey went to de dogs again. And dey went into bondage again. Only dis time it was in de City of Babylon.

[*The* CHOIR, *which has been singing "Cain't Stay Away," stops as the next scene begins.*

SCENE V

Under a low ceiling is a room vaguely resembling a Negro night club in New Orleans. Two or three long tables run across the room, and on the left is a table on a dais with a gaudy canopy above it. The table bears a card marked "Reserved for King and guests."

Flashy young men and women are seated at the tables. About a dozen couples are dancing in the foreground to the tune of a jazz orchestra. The costumes are what would be worn at a Negro masquerade to represent the debauchees of Babylon.

First Man : When did yuh git to Babylon ?

Second Man : I jes' got in yesterday.

Third Man (*dancing*) : How do you like dis baby, Joe ?

Fourth Man : Hot damn ! She could be de King's pet !

A Woman : Anybody seen my papa ?

Third Man : Don' fo'git de dance at de High Priest's house to-morrow.

[*The dance stops as a bugle call is heard. Enter* Master of Ceremonies.

Master of Ceremonies : Stop ! To-night's guest of honour, de King of Babylon an' party of five.

[*Enter the* King *and five girls. The* King *has on an imitation ermine cloak over his conventional evening clothes and wears a diamond tiara. All rise as the* King *enters, and sing, "Hail, de King of Bab—Bab—Babylong."*

King : Wait till you see de swell table I got. (*He crosses the stage to his table. The girls are jabbering.*) Remind me to send you a peck of rubies in de mo'nin'.

Master of Ceremonies : Ev'nin', King !

King : Good ev'nin'. How's de party goin' ?

Master of Ceremonies : Bes' one we ever had in Babylon, King.

King : Any Jew boys yere ?

Master of Ceremonies (*indicating some of the others*) : Lot o' dem yere. I kin go git mo' if you want 'em.

King : I was really referrin' to de High Priest. He's a 'ticlar frien' o' mine an' he might drop in. You know what he look like ?

Master of Ceremonies : No, suh, but I'll be on de look-out fo' him.

KING : O.K. Now le's have a li'l good time.

MASTER OF CEREMONIES : Yes, suh. (*To the orchestra.*) Let 'er go, boys.

[*The music begins, waiters appear with food and great urns painted gold and silver, from which they pour out wine for the guests. The* MASTER OF CEREMONIES *exits. The King's dancing-girls go to the middle of the floor, and start to dance. The* KING *puts his arms about the waists of two girls, and draws them to him.*

KING : Hot damn ! Da's de way ! Let de Jew boys see our gals kin dance better'n dere's. (*There is an ad lib. babel of "Da's de truth, King !" "I don' know—we got some good gals, too !" etc.*) Dey ain' nobody in de worl' like de Babylon gals.

[*The dancing grows faster, the watchers keep time with hand-claps. The door at the left opens suddenly, and the* PROPHET, *a patriarchal, ragged figure, enters. He looks belligerently about the room, and is followed almost immediately by the* MASTER OF CEREMONIES.

PROPHET : Stop ! (*The music and the dancers halt.*)
KING : What's the idea, bustin' up my party ?

MASTER OF CEREMONIES : He said he was expected, King. I thought mebbe he was de——

KING : Did you think he was de High Priest of de Hebrews ? Why, he's jest an ol' bum ! De High Priest is a fashion plate. T'row dis ole bum out o' yere !

PROPHET : Stop !

[*Those who have been advancing to seize him stop, somewhat amused.*

KING : Wait a minute. Don't throw him out. Let's see what he has to say.

PROPHET : Listen to me, King of Babylon ! I've been sent yere by de Lawd God Jehovah. Don't you dare lay a hand on de Prophet !

KING : Oh, you're a prophet, is yuh ? Well, you know we don' keer much fo' prophets in dis part of de country.

PROPHET : Listen to me, sons and daughters of Babylon ! Listen, you children of Israel dat's given yo'selves over to de evil ways of yo' oppressors ! You're all wallowin' like hogs in sin, an' de wrath of Gawd ain' goin' to be held back much longer ! I'm tellin' you, repent befo' it's too late. Repent befo' Jehovah casts down de same fire dat burned up Sodom and Gomorrah. Repent befo' de——(*During this scene yells increase as the* PROPHET *continues.*)

[*The* HIGH PRIEST *enters left. He is a fat voluptuary, elaborately clothed in brightly coloured robes. He walks in hand in hand with a gaudily dressed "chippy."*

HIGH PRIEST (*noise stops*) : Whoa, dere ! What you botherin' the King fo' ?

PROPHET (*wheeling*) : And you, de High Priest of all Israel, walkin' de town wid a dirty li'l tramp.

KING : Seems to be a frien' o' yours, Jake.

HIGH PRIEST (*crossing to the* KING *with his girl*) : Aw, he's one of dem wild men, like Jeremiah and Isaiah. Don' let him bother you none. (*Pushes* PROPHET *aside and goes to* KING's *table.*)

PROPHET : You consort with harlots, an' yo' pollution in the sight of de Lawd. De Lawd God's goin' to smite you down, jest as He's goin' to smite down all dis wicked world ! (*Grabs* HIGH PRIEST *and turns him around.*)

KING (*angrily against the last part of the preceding speech*) : Wait a minute. I'm getting tired of this. Don' throw him out. Jest kill him ! (*There is the sound of a shot. The* PROPHET *falls.*)

PROPHET : Smite 'em down, Lawd, like you said. Dey ain't a decent person left in de whole world.

[*He dies.* MASTER OF CEREMONIES, *revolver in hand, looks down at the* PROPHET.

MASTER OF CEREMONIES : He's dead, King.

KING : Some of you boys take him out.

[*A couple of young men come from the background and walk off with the body.*

HIGH PRIEST : Don' know whether you should'a done that, King.

KING : Why not ?

HIGH PRIEST : I don't know whether de Lawd would like it.

KING : Now, listen, Jake. You know yo' Lawd ain't payin' much attention to dis man's town. Except fo' you boys, it's tho'ly protected by de Gods o' Babylon.

HIGH PRIEST : I know, but jest de same——

KING : Look yere, s'pose I give you a couple hund'ed pieces of silver. Don' you s'pose you kin arrange to persuade yo' Gawd to keep His hands off ?

HIGH PRIEST (*oilily*) : Well, of co'se we could try. I dunno how well it would work.

[*As the* HIGH PRIEST *speaks, the* KING *claps his hands.* MASTER OF CEREMONIES *enters with bag of money.*

KING : Yere it is.

HIGH PRIEST (*smiling*) : I guess we kin square things up. (*He prays—whiningly.*) Oh, Lawd, please forgive my po' frien' de King o' Babylon. He didn't know what he was doin' an'——

[*There is a clap of thunder, darkness for a second. The lights go up and* GOD *is standing in the centre of the room.*

GOD (*in a voice of doom*) : Dat's about enough. (*The guests are horrified.*) I's stood all I kin from you. I tried to make dis a good earth. I helped

Adam, I helped Noah, I helped Moses, an' I helped David. What's de grain dat grew out of de seed ? Sin ! Nothin' but sin throughout de whole world. I've given you ev'y chance. I sent you warriors and prophets. I've given you laws and commandments, an' you betrayed My trust. Ev'ything I've given you, you've defiled. Ev'y time I've fo'given you, you've mocked Me. An' now de High Priest of Israel tries to trifle wid My name. Listen, you chillun of darkness, yo' Lawd is tired. I'm tired of de struggle to make you worthy of de breath I gave you. I put you in bondage ag'in to cure you an' yo' worse dan you was amongst de flesh pots o Egypt. So I renounce you. Listen to the words of yo' Lawd God Jehovah, for dey is de last words yo' ever hear from Me. I repent of dese people dat I have made and I will deliver dem no more.

[*There is darkness and cries of "Mercy!" "Have pity, Lawd!" "We didn't mean it, Lawd!" "Forgive us, Lawd!" etc. The* CHOIR *sings "Death's Gwinter Lay His Cold Icy Hands On Me," until the lights go up on the next scene.*

SCENE VI

GOD *is writing at His desk. Outside, past the door, goes* HOSEA, *a dignified old man, with wings like* JACOB'S. GOD, *sensing his presence, looks up from the paper He is examining, and follows him out of the corner of His eye. Angrily He resumes His work as soon as* HOSEA *is out of sight. There is a knock on the door.*

GOD : Who is it ?

[GABRIEL *enters.*

GABRIEL : It's de delegation, Lawd.

GOD (*wearily*) : Tell 'em to come in.

[ABRAHAM, ISAAC, JACOB, *and* MOSES *enter.*
Good mo'nin', gen'lemen.

THE VISITORS : Good mo'nin', Lawd.

GOD : What kin I do for you ?

MOSES : You know, Lawd. Go back to Your people.

GOD (*shaking His head*) : Ev'ry day fo' hund'eds of years you boys have come in to ask dat same thing. De answer is still de same. I repented of de people I made. I said I would deliver dem no more. Good mo'nin', gen'lemen. (*The four visitors rise and exeunt.* GABRIEL *remains.*) Gabe, why do dey do it ?

GABRIEL : I 'spect dey think You gonter change Yo' mind.

GOD (*sadly*) : Dey don' know Me. (HOSEA *again passes the door. His shadow shows on wall.* GABRIEL *is perplexed, as he watches.* GOD *again looks surreptitiously over His shoulder at the passing figure.*) I don' like dat, either.

GABRIEL : What, Lawd ?

GOD : Dat man.

GABRIEL : He's jest a prophet, Lawd. Dat's jest old Hosea. He jest come up the other day.

GOD : I know. He's one of de few dat's come up yere since I was on de earth last time.

GABRIEL : Ain' been annoyin' You, has he ?

GOD : I don' like him walkin' past de door.

GABRIEL : All You got to do is tell him to stop, Lawd.

GOD : Yes, I know. I don' want to tell him. He's got a right up yere or he wouldn' be yere.

GABRIEL : You needn't be bothered by him hangin' aroun' de office all de time. I'll tell 'im. Who's he think he——

GOD : No, Gabe. I find it ain't in Me to stop him. I sometimes jest wonder why he don' come in and say hello.

GABRIEL : You want him to do dat ?

[*He moves as if to go to the door.*

GOD : He never has spoke to Me, and if he don' wanta come in, I ain't gonter make him. But dat ain't de worst of it, Gabriel.

GABRIEL : What is, Lawd ?

GOD : Ev'y time he goes past de door I hears a voice.

GABRIEL : One of de angels ?

GOD (*shaking His head*) : It's from de earth. It's a man.

GABRIEL : You mean he's prayin ?

GOD : No, he ain't exactly prayin'. He's jest talkin' in such a way dat I got to lissen. His name is Hezdrel.

GABRIEL : Is he on de books ?

GOD : No, not yet. But ev'y time dat Hosea goes past I hear dat voice.

GABRIEL : Den tell *it* to stop.

GOD : I find I don' want to do that, either. Dey's gettin' ready to take Jerusalem down dere. Dat was My big fine city. Dis Hezdrel, he's jest one of de defenders. (*Suddenly and passionately, almost wildly.*) I ain't comin' down. You hear me ? I ain't comin' down. (*He looks at* GABRIEL.) Go ahead, Gabriel. 'Tend to you' chores. I'm gonter keep wukkin' yere.

GABRIEL : I hates to see You feelin' like dis, Lawd.

GOD : Dat's all right. Even bein' Gawd ain't a bed of roses. (GABRIEL *exits.* HOSEA'S *shadow is on the wall. For a second* HOSEA *hesitates.* GOD *looks at the wall. Goes to window.*) I hear you. I know

yo' fightin' bravely, but I ain't comin' down. Oh, why don' you leave Me alone? You know you ain't talkin' to Me. *Is* you talkin' to Me? I cain't stand yo' talkin' dat way. I kin only hear part of what you' sayin', and it puzzles Me. Don' you know you cain't puzzle God? (*A pause. Then tenderly.*) Do you want Me to come down dere ve'y much? You know I said I wouldn't come down? (*Fiercely.*) Why don' he answer Me a little? (*With clenched fists, looks down through the window.*) Listen! I'll tell you what I'll do. I ain't goin' to promise you anythin', and I ain't goin' to do nothin' to help you. I'm jest feelin' a little low, an' I'm only comin' down to make Myself feel a little better, dat's all.

[*The stage is darkened.* CHOIR *begins* "*A Blind Man Stood In De Middle of De Road,*" *and continues until the lights go up on the next secne.*

SCENE VII

It is a shadowed corner beside the walls of the temple in Jerusalem. The light of camp fires flickers on the figure of HEZDREL, *who was* ADAM *in Part I. He stands in the same position* ADAM *held when first discovered, but in his right hand is a sword, and his left is in a sling. Around him are several prostrate bodies. Pistol and cannon shots, then a trumpet call. Six young men enter from left in command of a* CORPORAL. *They are all armed.*

CORPORAL: De fightin's stopped fo' de night, Hezdrel.

HEZDREL: Yes?

CORPORAL: Dey're goin' to begin ag'in at cockcrow. (*Man enters, crosses the stage and exits.*) Herod say he's goin' to take de temple tomorrow, burn de books and de Ark of de Covenant, and put us all to de sword.

HEZDREL: Yo' ready, ain't you?

EVERYBODY : Yes, Hezdrel.

HEZDREL : Did de food get in through de hole in de city wall ?

[*Two soldiers enter, cross the stage, and exit.*

CORPORAL : Yessuh, we's goin' back to pass it out now.

HEZDREL : Good. Any mo' of our people escape to-day ?

CORPORAL : Ol' Herod's got de ol' hole covered up now, but fifteen of our people got out a new one we made.

[*Other soldiers enter, cross the stage and exit.*

HEZDREL : Good. Take dese yere wounded men back and git 'em took care of.

CORPORAL : Yes, suh.

[*They pick up the bodies on the ground and carry them offstage as* HEZDREL *speaks.*

HEZDREL : So dey gonter take de temple in de mo'nin' ? We'll be waitin' for 'em. Jest remember, boys, when dey kill us we leap out of our skins, right into de lap of God.

[*The men disappear with the wounded ; from the deep shadow upstage comes* GOD.

GOD : Hello, Hezdrel—Adam.

HEZDREL (*rubbing his forehead*) : Who is you ?

GOD : Me ? I'm jest an ol' preacher, from back in de hills.

HEZDREL : What you doin' yere?

GOD : I heard you boys was fightin'. I jest wanted to see how it was goin'.

HEZDREL : Well, it ain't goin' so well.

GOD : Dey got you skeered, huh ?

HEZDREL : Look yere, who is you, a spy in my brain ?

GOD : Cain't you see I's one of yo' people ?

HEZDREL : Listen, Preacher, we ain't skeered. We's gonter be killed, but we ain't skeered.

GOD : I's glad to hear dat. Kin I ask you a question, Hezdrel ?

HEZDREL : What is it ?

GOD : How is it you is so brave ?

HEZDREL : Caize we got faith, dat's why !

GOD : Faith ? In who ?

HEZDREL : In our dear Lawd God.

GOD : But God say He abandoned ev' one down yere.

HEZDREL : Who say dat ? Who dare say dat of de Lawd God of Hosea ?

GOD : De God of Hosea ?

HEZDREL : You heard me. Look yere, you *is* a spy in my brain !

GOD : No, I ain't, Hezdrel. I'm jest puzzled. You ought to know dat.

HEZDREL : How come you so puzzled 'bout de God of Hosea ?

GOD : I don' know, Maybe I jest don' hear things. You see, I live 'way back in de hills.

HEZDREL : What you wanter find out ?

GOD : Ain't de God of Hosea de same Jehovah dat was de God of Moses ?

HEZDREL (*contemptuously*) : No. Dat ol' God of wrath and vengeance ? We have de God dat Hosea preached to us. He's de one God.

GOD : Who's He ?

HEZDREL (*reverently*) : De God of mercy.

GOD : Hezdrel, don' you think dey must be de same God ?

HEZDREL : I don' know. I ain't bothered to think much about it. Maybe dey is. Maybe our God is de same ol' God. I guess we just got tired of His appearance dat ol' way.

GOD : What you mean, Hezdrel ?

HEZDREL : Oh, dat ol' God dat walked de earth in de shape of a man. I guess He lived wid man so much dat all He seen was de sins in man. Dat's what made Him de God of wrath and vengeance. Co'se He made Hosea. An' Hosea never would a found what mercy was unless dere was a little of it in God, too. Anyway, He ain't a fearsome God no mo'. Hosea showed us dat.

GOD : How you s'pose Hosea found dat mercy ?

HEZDREL : De only way he could find it. De only way I found it. De only way anyone kin find it.

GOD : How's dat ?

HEZDREL : Through sufferin'.

GOD (*after a pause*) : What if dey kill you in de mo'nin', Hezdrel.

HEZDREL : If dey do, dey do. Dat's all.

GOD : Herod say he's goin' to burn de temple—

HEZDREL : So he say.

GOD : And burn de Ark an' de books. Den dat's de end of de books, ain't it ?

HEZDREL (*buoyantly*) : What you mean ? If he burns dem things in dere ? Naw. Dem's jest copies.

GOD : Where is de others ?

HEZDREL (*tapping his head*) : Dey's a set in yere. Fifteen got out through de hole in the city wall to-day. A hundred and fifty got out durin' de week. Each of em is a set of de books. Dey's scattered safe all over de countryside now,

jest waitin' to git pen and paper fo' to put 'em down ag'in.

GOD (*proudly*) : Dey cain't lick you, kin dey, Hezdrel ?

HEZDREL (*smiling*) : I know they cain't. (*Trumpet.*) You better get out o' yere, Preacher, if you wanter carry de news to yo' people. It'll soon be daylight.

GOD : I'm goin'. (*He takes a step upstage and stops.*) Want Me to take any message ?

HEZDREL : Tell de people in de hills dey ain't nobody like de Lawd God of Hosea.

GOD : I will. If dey kill you to-morrow I'll bet dat God of Hosea'll be waitin' for you.

HEZDREL : I *know* He will.

GOD (*quietly*) : Thank you, Hezdrel.

HEZDREL : Fo' what ?

GOD : Fo' telling Me so much. You see I been so far away, I guess I was jest way behin' de times.

[*He exits. Pause, then trumpet sounds.*

[HEZDREL *paces back and forth once or twice. Another young soldier appears. Other men enter and stand grouped about* HEZDREL.

SECOND OFFICER (*excitedly*) : De cock's jest crowed, Hezdrel. Dey started de fightin' ag'in.

HEZDREL : We's ready for 'em. Come on, boys. (*From the darkness upstage comes another group of soldiers.*) Dis is de day dey say dey'll git us. Le's fight till de last man goes. What d'you say ?

CORPORAL : Le's go, Hezdrel !

HEZDREL (*calling left*) : Give 'em ev'ything, boys !

[*There is a movement toward the left, a bugle call and the sound of distant battle. The lights go out. The* CHOIR *is heard singing "March On," triumphantly. They continue to sing after the lights go up on the next scene.*

Scene VIII

It is the same setting as the Fish Fry Scene in Part I. The same Angels *are present, but the* Choir, *instead of marching, is standing in a double row on an angle upstage right.* God *is seated in an armchair near centre. He faces the audience. As the* Choir *continues to sing,* Gabriel *enters, unnoticed by the chattering* Angels. *He looks at* God *who is staring thoughtfully toward the audience.*

Gabriel : You look a little pensive, Lawd. (God *nods His head.*) Have a seegar, Lawd ?

God : No thanks, Gabriel.

[Gabriel *goes to the table, accepts a cup of custard ; chats with the* Angel *behind the table for a moment as he sips, puts the cup down and returns to the side of* God.

Gabriel : You look awful pensive, Lawd. You been sittin' yere, lookin' dis way, an awful long time. Is it somethin' serious, Lawd ?

God : Very serious, Gabriel.

Gabriel (*awed by His tone*) : Lawd, is de time come for me to blow ?

God : Not yet, Gabriel. I'm just thinkin'.

Gabriel : What about, Lawd ? (*Puts up hand. Singing stops.*)

God : 'Bout something' de boy tol' me. Somethin' 'bout Hosea, and himself. How dey foun' somethin'.

Gabriel : What, Lawd ?

God : Mercy. (*A pause.*) Through *sufferin'*, he said.

Gabriel : Yes, Lawd.

God : I'm tryin' to find it, too. It's awful impo'tant. It's awful impo'tant to all de people on My earth. Did he mean dat even God must suffer ?

[GOD *continues to look out over the audience for a moment and then a look of surprise comes into His face. He sighs. In the distance a* VOICE *cries.*

THE VOICE : Oh, look at Him ! Oh, look, dey goin' to make Him carry it up dat high hill ! Dey goin' to nail Him to it ! Oh, dat's a terrible burden for one man to carry !

[GOD *rises and murmurs " Yes ! " as if in recognition. The heavenly beings have been watching Him closely, and now, seeing Him smile gently, draw back, relieved. All the* ANGELS *burst into " Hallelujah, King Jesus."* GOD *continues to smile as the lights fade away. The singing becomes fortissimo.*

CURTAIN

STREET SCENE

Programme of the First Night at the

GLOBE THEATRE, LONDON

Tuesday Evening, September 9th, 1930

LEON M. LION

in association with MAURICE BROWNE presents

STREET SCENE

by Elmer Rice

CHARACTERS (*in order of their first appearance*)

ABRAHAM KAPLAN	Abraham Sofaer
GRETA FIORENTINO	Grace Mills
EMMA JONES	Margaret Moffat
OLGA OLSEN	Mary Christensen
WILLIE MAURRANT	Master Charles Hawtrey
ANNA MAURRANT	Mary Servoss
DANIEL BUCHANAN	Conway Washburn
FRANK MAURRANT	David Landau
GEORGE JONES	Edgar K. Bruce
STEVE SANKEY	Douglas Jeffries
AGNES CUSHING	Miriam Elliott
CARL OLSEN	Campbell Logan
SHIRLEY KAPLAN	Mary Grew
FILIPPO FIORENTINO	Stanley Velvin
ALICE SIMPSON	Agnes Lauchlan
LAURA HILDEBRAND	Natalie Lynn
MARY HILDEBRAND	Josephine Huntley-Wright
CHARLIE HILDEBRAND	Henry Brice
SAMUEL KAPLAN	Leonard Sachs
ROSE MAURRANT	Erin O'Brien Moore
HARRY EASTER	Jack Minster
MAE JONES	Millicent Green
DICK MCGANN	Alan d'Urai
VINCENT JONES	Charles Farrell
DR. JOHN WILSON	A. W. Tyrer
OFFICER HARRY MURPHY	T. B. O'Loghlin
A MILKMAN	Michael Curwen
A LETTER-CARRIER	Leonard Calvert
AN ICE-MAN	N. J. Giannini
A COLLEGE GIRL	Constance Cumber
ANOTHER COLLEGE GIRL	Aileen Wood
A MUSIC STUDENT	Jacqueline Arnold
MARSHAL JAMES HENRY	Percy Standing
FRED CULLEN	Bernard Howard
AN OLD-CLOTHES MAN	Sydney Benson
AN INTERNE	Arthur Brander
AN AMBULANCE MAN A FURNITURE MOVER	Clifford Cobb
A NURSE MAID	Agnes Lauchlan
ANOTHER NURSE MAID	Helen Trevelyan
POLICEMEN	Harry Hayward Forbes McLean
TWO APARTMENT HUNTERS	Mona Harrison Cameron Hall
QUEENIE	Peggy of Battersea
PASSERS-BY	

The action takes place on an evening in June, and the morning and afternoon of the following day

The Play directed by the Author

STREET SCENE

A Play in Three Acts

by

ELMER L. RICE

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The cast of the play as originally presented at THE PLAYHOUSE, New York City, January 10th, 1929

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PRESENTS

STREET SCENE

A Play in Three Acts

By ELMER RICE

DIRECTED BY THE AUTHOR

SETTING BY JO MIELZINER

CHARACTERS

(*In the order of their first appearance*)

ABRAHAM KAPLAN	Leo Bulgakov
GRETA FIORENTINO	Eleanor Wesselhoeft
EMMA JONES	Beulah Bondi
OLGA OLSEN	Hilda Bruce
WILLIE MAURRANT	Russell Griffin
ANNA MAURRANT	Mary Servoss
DANIEL BUCHANAN	Conway Washburne
FRANK MAURRANT	Robert Kelly
GEORGE JONES	T. H. Manning
STEVE SANKEY	Joseph Baird
AGNES CUSHING	Jane Corcoran
CARL OLSEN	John M. Qualen
SHIRLEY KAPLAN	Anna Kostant
FILIPPO FIORENTINO	George Humbert
ALICE SIMPSON	Emily Hamill
LAURA HILDEBRAND	Frederica Going
MARY HILDEBRAND	Eileen Smith
CHARLIE HILDEBRAND	Alexander Lewis
SAMUEL KAPLAN	Horace Braham
ROSE MAURRANT	Erin O'Brien-Moore
HARRY EASTER	Glenn Coulter
MAE JONES	Millicent Green
DICK MCGANN	Joseph Lee

VINCENT JONES	Matthew McHugh
DR. JOHN WILSON	John Crump
OFFICER HARRY MURPHY	Edward Downes
A MILKMAN	Ralph Willard
A LETTER-CARRIER	Herbert Lindholm
AN ICE-MAN	Samuel S. Bonnell
TWO COLLEGE GIRLS	Rose Lerner Astrid Alwynn
A MUSIC STUDENT	Mary Emerson
MARSHAL JAMES HENRY	Ellsworth Jones
FRED CULLEN	Jean Sidney
AN OLD-CLOTHES MAN	Joe Cogert
AN INTERNE	Samuel S. Bonnell
AN AMBULANCE DRIVER	Anthony Pawley
A FURNITURE MOVER	Ed. A. McHugh
TWO NURSEMAIDS	Astrid Alwynn Nelly Neil
POLICEMEN	Carl C. Milter John Kelly Anthony Pawley
TWO APARTMENT HUNTERS	Frances F. Golden Otto Frederick

PASSERS-BY: Ruth Randolph, Elizabeth Goodyear, Josephine Coghlan, Emily Hamill, Jean Sidney, Samuel S. Bonnell, Robert Mack, John Cambridge, Carl C. Milter, Anthony Pawley, Herbert Lindholm, Ed. A. McHugh, Ralph Willard, Otto Frederick, Benn Trivers

There is only one setting, which is described in detail in the text.

The action takes place on an evening in June, and on the morning and afternoon of the following day.

ACT I

SCENE : The exterior of a " walk-up " apartment-house, in a mean quarter of New York. It is of ugly brownstone and was built in the '90's. Between the pavement of large, grey flagstones and the front of the house is a deep and narrow " area-way," guarded by a rusted, ornamental iron railing. At the right, a steep flight of rotting wooden steps leads down to the cellar and to the janitor's apartment, the windows of which are just visible above the street level. Spanning the area-way is a " stoop " of four shallow, stone steps, flanked on either side by a curved stone balustrade. Beyond the broad fourth step, another step leads to the double wooden outer doors of the house ; and as these are open, the vestibule, and the wide, heavy glass-panelled entrance door beyond are visible. Above the outer doors is a glass fanlight, upon which appears the half-obliterated house number. At the left side of the doorway is a sign which reads : " Flat To Let. 6 Rooms. Steam Heat."

On either side of the stoop are the two narrow windows of the ground-floor apartments. In one of the windows, at the left, is a sign bearing the legend : "Prof. Filippo Fiorentino. Music for all occasions. Also instruction." Above, are the six narrow windows of the first-floor apartments, and above that, the stone sills of the second-floor windows can just be seen.

To the left of the house, part of the adjoining building is visible : the motor entrance to a storage warehouse. Crude boarding across the large driveway and rough planks across the sidewalk and curb indicate that an excavation is in progress. On the boarding is painted in rude lettering : " Keep Out " ; and at the curb is a small barrel bearing a sign with the words : " Street Closed." To the wall of the warehouse is affixed a brass plate, bearing the name : " Patrick Mulcahy Storage Warehouse Co. Inc."

To the right of the house, scaffolding and a wooden sidewalk indicate that the house next door is being

demolished. On the scaffolding is a large, wooden sign reading : " Manhattan House-Wrecking Corp."

In the close foreground, below the level of the curb, is a mere suggestion of the street.

AT RISE : The house is seen in the white glare of an arc-light, which is just off stage to the right. The windows in the janitor's apartment are lighted, as are also those of the ground-floor apartment, at the right, and the two windows at the extreme left of the first-floor. A dim, red light is affixed to the boarding of the excavation at the left.

In the lighted ground-floor window, at the right of the doorway, ABRAHAM KAPLAN *is seated, in a rocking-chair, reading a Yiddish newspaper. He is a Russian Jew, well past sixty : clean shaven, thick grey hair, hooked nose, horn-rimmed spectacles. To the left of the doorway,* GRETA FIORENTINO *is leaning out of the window. She is forty, blonde, ruddy-faced and stout. She wears a wrapper of light, flowered material and a large pillow supports her left arm and her ample, uncorseted bosom. In her right hand is a folding paper fan, which she waves languidly.*

Throughout the act and, indeed, throughout the play, there is constant noise. The noises of the city rise, fall, intermingle : the distant roar of " L " trains, automobile sirens and the whistles of boats on the river ; the rattle of trucks and the indeterminate clanking of metals ; fire-engines, ambulances, musical instruments, a radio, dogs barking and human voices calling, quarrelling and screaming with laughter. The noises are subdued and in the background, but they never wholly cease.

A moment after the rise of the curtain, an elderly man enters at the right and walks into the house, exchanging a nod with MRS. FIORENTINO. *A* MAN, *munching peanuts, crosses the stage from left to right.*

A VOICE (*off stage*) : Char-lie !

[EMMA JONES *appears at the left. She is middle-aged, tall and rather bony. She carries a small parcel.*

MRS. FIORENTINO (*she speaks with a faint German accent*) : Good evening, Mrs. Jones.

MRS. JONES (*stopping beneath* MRS. FIORENTINO'S *window*) : Good evenin', Mrs. F. Well, I hope it's hot enough for you.

MRS. FIORENTINO : Ain't it joost awful ? When I was through with the dishes, you could take my clothes and joost wring them out.

MRS. JONES : Me, too. I ain't got a dry stitch on me.

MRS. FIORENTINO : I took off my shoes and my corset and made myself nice and comfortable, and to-night before I go to bed, I take a nice bath.

MRS. JONES : The trouble with a bath is, by the time you're all through, you're as hot as when you started. (*As* OLGA OLSEN, *a thin, anæmic Scandinavian, with untidy fair hair, comes up the cellar steps and on to the sidewalk*) : Good evenin', Mrs. Olsen. Awful hot, ain't it ?

MRS. OLSEN (*coming over to the front of the stoop*) : Yust awful. Mrs. Forentiner, my hoosban' say vill you put de garbage on de doom-vaider ?

MRS. FIORENTINO : Oh, sure, sure ! I didn't hear him vistle. (*As* MRS. JONES *starts to cross to the stoop*) : Don't go 'vay, Mrs. Jones. (*She disappears from the window.*)

MRS. OLSEN (*pushing back some wisps of hair*) : I tank is more cooler in de cellar.

MRS. JONES (*sitting on the stoop and fanning herself with her parcel*) : Phew ! I'm just about ready to pass out.

MRS. OLSEN : My baby is crying, crying all day.

MRS. JONES : Yeah, I often say they mind the heat more'n we do. It's the same with dogs. My Queenie has jes' been layin' aroun' all day.

MRS. OLSEN : The baby get new teet'. It hurt her.

MRS. JONES : Don't tell me ! If you was to know what I went t'roo with my Vincent. Half the time, he used to have convulsions.

[WILLIE MAURRANT, *a disorderly boy of twelve, appears on the left, on roller skates. He stops at the left of the stoop and takes hold of the railings with both hands.*

WILLIE (*raising his head and bawling*) : Hey, ma !

MRS. JONES (*disapprovingly*) : If you want your mother, why don't you go upstairs, instead o' yellin' like that ?

WILLIE (*without paying the slightest attention to her, bawls louder*) : Hey, ma !

MRS. MAURRANT (*appearing at one of the lighted first-floor windows*) : What do you want, Willie ?

[*She is a fair woman of forty, who looks her age, but is by no means unattractive.*

WILLIE : Gimme a dime, will ya ? I wanna git a cone.

MRS. MAURRANT (*to* MRS. OLSEN *and* MRS. JONES) : Good evening.

MRS. OLSEN ; MRS. JONES : Good evenin', Mrs. Maurrant.

MRS. MAURRANT (*to* WILLIE) : How many cones did you have to-day, already ?

WILLIE (*belligerently*) : I'm hot ! All de other guys is havin' cones. Come on, gimme a dime.

MRS. MAURRANT : Well, it's the last one. (*She disappears.*)

MRS. JONES : You certainly don't talk very nice to your mother. (*To* MRS. OLSEN) : I'd like to hear one o' mine talkin' that way to me !

MRS. MAURRANT (*appearing at the window*) : Remember, this is the last one.

WILLIE : Aw right. T'row it down.

[MRS. FIORENTINO *reappears and leans out of the window again.*

MRS. MAURRANT : Catch it !

[*She throws out a twist of newspaper.* WILLIE *scrambles for it, hastily extracts the dime, drops the newspaper on the pavement and skates off, at the left.*

MRS. FIORENTINO (*twisting her neck upwards*) : Good evening, Mrs. Maurrant.

MRS. MAURRANT : Good evening, Mrs. Fiorentino. (*Calling after* WILLIE) : And don't come home too late, Willie !

[*But* WILLIE *is already out of earshot.*

MRS. FIORENTINO : Why don't you come down and be sociable ?

MRS. MAURRANT : I'm keeping some supper warm for my husband. (*A slight pause*) : Well, maybe I will for just a minute. (*She leaves the window. The lights in her apartment go out*).

MRS. FIORENTINO : She has her troubles with dot Willie.

MRS. JONES : I guess it don't bother her much. (*Significantly*) She's got her mind on other things.

MRS. OLSEN (*looking about cautiously and coming over to the left of the stoop between the two women*) : He vas comin' again to-day to see her.

MRS. JONES (*rising excitedly, and leaning over the balustrade*) : Who—Sankey ?

MRS. OLSEN (*nodding*) : Yes.

MRS. FIORENTINO : Are you sure. Mrs. Olsen ?

MRS. OLSEN : I seen him. I vas doostin' de halls.

MRS. FIORENTINO : Dot's terrible !

MRS. JONES : Wouldn't you think a woman her age, with a grown-up daughter—— !

MRS. OLSEN : Two times already dis veek, I see him here.

MRS. JONES : I seen him, meself, one day last week. He was comin' out o' the house, jest as I was comin' in wit' de dog. " Good mornin', Mrs. Jones," he says to me, as if butter wouldn't melt in his mouth. " Good mornin'," says I, lookin' him straight in the eye— (*breaking off suddenly, as the vestibule door opens*) Be careful, she's comin'.

[MRS. MAURRANT *comes out of the house and stops, for a moment, on the top step.*

MRS. MAURRANT : Goodness, ain't it hot ! I think it's really cooler upstairs.

[*She comes down the steps to the sidewalk.*

MRS. JONES : Yeah, jes' what I was sayin', meself. I feel like a wet dish-rag.

MRS. MAURRANT : I would have liked to go to the Park concert to-night, if Rose had got home in time. I don't get much chance to go to concerts. My husband don't care for music. But Rose is more like me—just crazy about it.

MRS. JONES : Ain't she home yet ?

MRS. MAURRANT : No. I think maybe she had to work overtime.

MRS. JONES : Well, all mine ever comes home for is to sleep.

MRS. FIORENTINO : The young girls nowadays—— !

MRS. OLSEN : My sister was writin' me in Schweden is same t'ing——

MRS. JONES : It ain't only the young ones, either.

[*A baby is heard crying in the cellar.*

OLSEN'S VOICE (*from the cellar*) : Ol-ga !

[*A* MAN, *in a dinner jacket and straw hat, appears at the left, whistling a jazz tune. He crosses the stage and goes off at the right.*

MRS. OLSEN (*hurrying to the right*) : I betcha the baby, she's cryin' again.

OLSEN'S VOICE : Ol-ga !

MRS. OLSEN : Yes. I come right away.

[*She goes down the cellar steps.*

MRS. JONES : What them foreigners don't know about bringin' up babies would fill a book.

MRS. FIORENTINO (*a little huffily*) : Foreigners know joost as much as other people, Mrs. Jones. My mother had eight children and she brought up seven.

MRS. JONES (*tactfully*) : Well, I'm not sayin' anythin' about the Joimans. The Joimans is different—more like the Irish. What I'm talkin' about is all them squareheads an' Polacks—— (*with a glance in* KAPLAN'S *direction*)—an' Jews.

BUCHANAN'S VOICE (*from a third story window*) : Good evening, ladies.

THE WOMEN (*in unison, looking upward*) : Oh, good evening, Mr. Buchanan.

BUCHANAN'S VOICE : Well, is it hot enough for you ?

MRS. JONES : I'll say !

BUCHANAN'S VOICE : I was just saying to my wife, it's not the heat I mind as much as it is the humidity.

MRS. JONES : Yeah, that's it ! Makes everything stick to you.

MRS. MAURRANT : How's your wife feeling in this weather ?

BUCHANAN'S VOICE : She don't complain about the weather. But she's afraid to go out of the house. Thinks maybe she couldn't get back in time, in case—you know.

MRS. JONES (*to the other women*) : I was the same way, with my Vincent—afraid to take a step. But with Mae, I was up an' out till the very last minute.

MRS. FIORENTINO (*craning her neck upward*) : Mr. Buchanan, do you think she would eat some nice minestrone—good Italian vegetable-soup ?

BUCHANAN'S VOICE : Why, much obliged, Mrs. F., but I really can't get her to eat a thing.

MRS. JONES (*rising and looking upward*) : Tell her she ought to keep up her strength. She's got two to feed, you know.

BUCHANAN'S VOICE : Excuse me, she's calling.

MRS. JONES (*crossing to the railing, at the left of* MRS. FIORENTINO) : You'd think it was him that was havin' the baby.

MRS. MAURRANT : She's such a puny little thing.

MRS. FIORENTINO (*with a sigh*) : Well, that's the way it goes. The little skinny ones have them and the big strong ones don't.

MRS. MAURRANT : Don't take it that way, Mrs. Fiorentino. You're a young woman, yet.

MRS. FIORENTINO (*shaking her head*) : Oh, well !

MRS. JONES : My aunt, Mrs. Barclay, was forty-two—— (*Breaking off*) Oh, good evenin', Mr. Maurrant !

[FRANK MAURRANT *appears, at the left, with his coat on his arm. He is a tall, powerfully-built man of forty-five, with a rugged, grim face.*

MRS. FIORENTINO : Good evening, Mr. Maurrant.

MAURRANT : 'Evenin'. (*He goes to the stoop and seats himself, mopping his face.*) Some baby of a day !

MRS. MAURRANT : Have you been working all this while, Frank ?

MAURRANT : I'll say I've been workin'. Dress-rehearsin' since twelve o'clock, with lights—in this weather. An' to-morra I gotta go to Stamford, for the try-out.

MRS. MAURRANT : Oh, you're going to Stamford to-morrow ?

MAURRANT : Yeah, the whole crew's goin'. (*Looking at her*) What about it ?

MRS. MAURRANT : Why, nothing. Oh, I've got some cabbage and potatoes on the stove for you.

MAURRANT : I just had a plate o' beans at the Coffee Pot. All I want is a good wash. I been sweatin' like a horse, all day.

[*He rises and goes up the steps.*

MRS. FIORENTINO : My husband, too ; he's sweating terrible.

MRS. JONES : Mine don't. There's some people that just naturally do, and then there's others that don't.

MAURRANT (*To* MRS. MAURRANT) : Is anybody upstairs ?

MRS. MAURRANT : No. Willie's off playing with the boys. I can't keep him home.

MAURRANT : What about Rose ?

MRS. MAURRANT : I think maybe she's working overtime.

MAURRANT : I never heard o' nobody workin' nights in a real-estate office.

MRS. MAURRANT : I thought maybe on account of the office being closed to-morrow—— (*To the*

others) Mr. Jacobson, the head of the firm, died Tuesday, and to-morrow's the funeral, so I thought maybe——

MRS. JONES : Yeah. Leave it to the Jews not to lose a workin' day, without makin' up for it.

MAURRANT (*to* MRS. MAURRANT) : She shouldn't be stayin' out nights without us knowin' where she is.

MRS. MAURRANT : She didn't say a word about not coming home.

MAURRANT : That's what I'm sayin', ain't it? It's a mother's place to know what her daughter's doin'.

MRS. FIORENTINO (*soothingly*) : Things are different nowadays, Mr. Maurrant, from what they used to be.

MAURRANT : Not in my family, they're not goin' to be no different. Not so long as I got somethin' to say.

A GIRL'S VOICE (*off-stage*) : Red Rover ! Red Rover ! Let Freddie come over !

[GEORGE JONES, *a short, rather plump, red-faced man, cigar in mouth, comes out of the house, as* MAURRANT *enters the vestibule.*

JONES : Hello, Mr. Maurrant.

MAURRANT (*curtly*) : 'Evenin'.

[*He enters the house.* JONES *looks after him in surprise, for a moment.* MRS. MAURRANT *seats herself on the stoop.*

JONES : Good evenin', ladies.

MRS. FIORENTINO ; MRS. MAURRANT : Good evening, Mr. Jones.

JONES : (*seating himself on the left balustrade*) : What's the matter with your hubby, Mrs. Maurrant ? Guess he's feelin' the heat, huh ?

MRS. MAURRANT : He's been working till just now and I guess he's a little tired.

MRS. JONES : Men are all alike. They're all easy to get along with, so long as everythin's goin' the way they want it to. But once it don't —good night !

MRS. FIORENTINO : Yes, dot's true, Mrs. Jones.

JONES : Yeah, an' what about the women ?

MRS. MAURRANT : I guess it's just the same with the women. I often think it's a shame that people don't get along better, together. People ought to be able to live together in peace and quiet, without making each other miserable.

MRS. JONES : The way I look at it, you get married for better or worse, an' if it turns out to be worse, why all you can do is make the best of it.

MRS. MAURRANT : I think the trouble is people don't make allowances. They don't realize that everybody wants a kind word, now and then. After all, we're all human, and we can't just go along by ourselves, all the time, without ever getting a kind word.

[*While she is speaking*, STEVE SANKEY *appears at the right. He is in the early thirties, and is prematurely bald. He is rather flashily dressed, in a patently cheap, light-grey suit, and a straw hat, with a plaid band. As he appears*, MRS. JONES *and* MRS. FIORENTINO *exchange a swift, significant look.*

SANKEY (*stopping at the right of the stoop and removing his hat*) : Good evening, folks ! Is it hot enough for you ?

THE OTHERS : Good evening.

MRS. MAURRANT (*self-consciously*) : Good evening, Mr. Sankey.

[*Throughout the scene*, MRS. MAURRANT *and* SANKEY *try vainly to avoid looking at each other.*

SANKEY : I don't know when we've had a day like this. Hottest June fifteenth in forty-one years. It was up to ninety-four at 3 p.m.

JONES : Six dead in Chicago. An' no relief in sight, the evenin' paper says.

[MAURRANT *appears at the window of his apartment and stands there, looking out.*

MRS. FIORENTINO : It's joost awful !

SANKEY : Well, it's good for the milk business. You know the old saying, it's an ill wind that blows nobody any good.

MRS. MAURRANT : Yes. You hardly get the milk in the morning, before it turns sour.

MRS. JONES : I'm just after pourin' half a bottle down the sink.

[MAURRANT *leaves the window.*

MRS. FIORENTINO : You shouldn't throw it avay. You should make—what do you call it ?—schmier-käs'.

SANKEY : Oh, I know what you mean—pot-cheese. My wife makes it, too, once in a while.

MRS. MAURRANT : Is your wife all right again, Mr. Sankey ? You were telling me last time, she had a cold.

[MRS. JONES *and* MRS. FIORENTINO *exchange another look.*

SANKEY : Was I ? Oh, sure, sure. That was a coupla weeks ago. Yes, sure, she's all right again. That didn't amount to anything much.

MRS. JONES : You got a family, too, ain't you ?

SANKEY : Yes. Yes, I have. Two little girls. Well, I got to be going along. (*He goes to the left of the stoop and stops again.*) I told my wife I'd go down to the drug-store and get her some nice cold ginger-ale. You want something to cool you off in this kind of weather.

MRS. JONES (*as* SANKEY *passes her*) : If you ask me, all that gassy stuff don't do you a bit of good.

SANKEY : I guess you're right, at that. Still it cools you off. Well, good night, folks. See you all again.

[*He strolls off, at the left, with affected nonchalance ; but when he is almost out of sight, he casts a swift look back at* MRS. MAURRANT.

A dowdy WOMAN, *wheeling a dilapidated baby carriage, appears at the left, and crosses the stage.*

JONES : What's his name—Sankey ?

MRS. JONES : Yeah—Mr. Sankey.

MRS. MAURRANT : He's the collector for the milk company.

[AGNES CUSHING *comes out of the house. She is a thin, dried-up woman, past fifty.*

MISS CUSHING (*coming down the steps*) : Good evening.

THE OTHERS : Good evening, Miss Cushing.

MRS. MAURRANT : How is your mother to-day, Miss Cushing ?

MISS CUSHING (*pausing at the left of the stoop*) : Why, she complains of the heat. But I'm afraid it's really her heart. She's seventy-two, you know. I'm just going down to the corner to get her a little ice cream.

[*As she goes off at the left,* OLSEN, *the janitor, a lanky Swede, struggles up the cellar steps with a large, covered, tin garbage-barrel. The others look around in annoyance, as he bangs the garbage-barrel upon the pavement.*

OLSEN : Phew ! Hot !

[*He mops his face and neck with a dingy handkerchief, then lights his pipe and leans against the railing.*

MRS. JONES (*significantly, as she crosses to the centre of the stoop and sits*) : Between you and I, I don't think her mother's got long for this world. Once the heart starts goin' back on you—— !

MRS. FIORENTINO : It's too bad.

MRS. MAURRANT : Poor soul ! She'll have nothing at all when her mother dies. She's just spent her whole life looking after her mother.

MRS. JONES : It's no more than her duty, is it ?

MRS. FIORENTINO : You could not expect that she should neglect her mother.

A VOICE (*off stage*) : Char-lie !

MRS. MAURRANT : It's not a matter of neglecting. Only—it seems as if a person should get more out of life than just looking after somebody else.

MRS. JONES : Well, I hope to tell you, after all I've done for mine, I expect 'em to look after me, in my old age.

MRS. MAURRANT : I don't know. It seems to me you might just as well not live at all, as the way she does. (*Rising, with affected casualness*) I don't know what's become of Willie. I think I'd better walk down to the corner and look for him. My husband don't like it if he stays out late.

[*She goes off at the left. They all watch her, in dead silence, until she is out of earshot. Then the storm breaks.*

MRS. JONES (*rising excitedly*) : Didja get that ? Goin' to look for Willie ! Can ya beat it ?

MRS. FIORENTINO : It's joost terrible !

JONES : You think she's just goin' out lookin' for this guy Sankey ?

MRS. JONES (*scornfully*) : Ain't men the limit ? What do you think he come walkin' by here for ? (*Mincingly*) Just strolled by to get the wife

a little ginger-ale. A fat lot he cares whether his wife has ginger-ale !

MRS. FIORENTINO : Two little girls he's got, too !

JONES : Yeah, that ain't right—a bird like that, wit' a wife an' two kids of his own.

MRS. FIORENTINO : The way he stands there and looks and looks at her !

MRS. JONES : An' what about the looks she was givin' him ! (*Seating herself again*) You'd think he was the Prince of Wales, instead of a milk collector. And didja get the crack about not seein' him for two weeks ?

MRS. FIORENTINO : And joost to-day he was upstairs, Mrs. Olsen says.

[OLSEN *approaches the stoop and removes his pipe from his mouth.*

OLSEN (*pointing upwards*) : Some day, her hoosban' is killing him.

[*He replaces his pipe and goes back to his former position.*

MRS. FIORENTINO : Dot would be terrible !

JONES : He's li'ble to, at that. You know, he's got a wicked look in his eye, dat baby has.

MRS. JONES : Well, it's no more than he deserves, the little rabbit—goin' around breakin' up people's homes. (*Mockingly*) Good evenin', folks ! Jes' like Whozis on the radio.

JONES : D'ya think Maurrant is wise to what's goin' on ?

MRS. JONES : Well, if he ain't, there must be somethin' the matter with him. But you never can tell about men. They're as blind as bats. An' what I always say is, in a case like that, the husband or the wife is always the last one to find out.

[MISS CUSHING, *carrying a small paper bag, hurries on, at the left, in a state of great excitement.*

MISS CUSHING (*breathlessly, as she comes up the left of the stoop*) : Say, what do you think ! I just saw them together—the two of them !

MRS. JONES (*rising excitedly*) : What did I tell you ?

MRS. FIORENTINO : Where did you see them, Miss Cushing ?

MISS CUSHING : Why, right next door, in the entrance to the warehouse. They were standing right close together. And he had his hands upon her shoulders. It's awful, isn't it ?

JONES : Looks to me like this thing is gettin' pretty serious.

MRS. JONES : You didn't notice if they was kissin' or anythin', did you ?

MISS CUSHING : Well, to tell you the truth, Mrs. Jones, I was so ashamed for her, that I hardly looked at all.

JONES (*sotto voce, as the house door opens*) : Look out ! Maurrant's comin'.

[*A conspirators' silence falls upon them, as* MAURRANT, *pipe in mouth, comes out of the house.*

MISS CUSHING (*tremulously*) : Good evening, Mr. Maurrant.

MAURRANT (*on the top step*) : 'Evenin'. (*To the others*) What's become of me wife ?

MRS. JONES : Why, she said she was goin' around the corner to look for Willie.

MAURRANT (*grunts*) : Oh.

MRS. JONES : They need a lot of lookin' after, when they're that age.

[*A momentary silence.*

MISS CUSHING : Well, I think I'd better get back to my mother.

[*She goes up the steps.*

MRS. JONES ; MRS. FIORENTINO ; JONES : Good-night, Miss Cushing.

MISS CUSHING : Good night. (*As she passes* MAURRANT) : Good night, Mr. Maurrant.

MAURRANT : 'Night.

[*She looks at him swiftly, and goes into the vestibule.*

A BOY'S VOICE (*off stage*) : Red Rover ! Red Rover ! Let Mary come over !

[*As* MISS CUSHING *enters the house,* SHIRLEY KAPLAN *appears at the ground-floor window, at the extreme right, with a glass of steaming tea in her hand. She is a dark, unattractive Jewess, past thirty. She wears a light house-dress.* KAPLAN *goes on reading.*

SHIRLEY (*to the neighbours outside ; she speaks with the faintest trace of accent*) : Good evening.

THE OTHERS (*not very cordially*) : Good evenin'.

SHIRLEY : It's been a terrible day, hasn't it ?

JONES ; MRS. JONES : Yeah.

SHIRLEY (*going to the other window*) : Papa, here's your tea. Haven't you finished your paper yet ? It makes it so hot, with the lights on.

KAPLAN (*lowering his newspaper*) : Oll right ! Oll right ! Put it out ! Put it out ! There is anahoo, notting to read in de papers. Notting but dee-vorce, skendal, and moiders.

[*He speaks with a strong accent, over-emphatically and with much gesticulation. He puts his paper away, removes his glasses, and starts to drink his tea.*

SHIRLEY : There doesn't seem to be a breath of air, anywhere.

[*No one answers.* SHIRLEY *goes away from the window and puts out the lights.*

MRS. JONES (*sotto voce*) : You wouldn't think anybody would want to read that Hebrew

writin', would ya ? I don't see how they make head or tail out of it, meself.

JONES : I guess if you learn it when you're a kid——

MRS. JONES (*suddenly*) : Well, will you look at your hubby, Mrs. F. ! He's sure got his hands full !

[*She looks towards the left, greatly amused.*

[SHIRLEY *reappears at the window at the extreme right, and seats herself on the sill.*

MRS. FIORENTINO (*leaning far out*) : Joost look at him ! (*Calling*) Lippo, be careful you don't drop any !

LIPPO (*off stage*) : 'Allo, Margherita !

[*They all watch in amusement, as* FILIPPO FIORENTINO, *a fat Italian, with thick black hair and moustache, comes on at the left. He is clutching a violin in his left arm and balancing five ice-cream cones in his right hand.*

LIPPO (*shouting*) : Who wantsa da ice-cream cone ? Nice fresha ice-cream cone !

MRS. FIORENTINO : Lippo, you will drop them !

MRS. JONES (*going up to him*) : Here, gimme your violin.

[*She relieves him of the violin and he shifts two of the cones to his left hand.*

LIPPO (*as* MRS. JONES *hands the violin to* MRS. FIORENTINO) : T'ank you, Meeses Jones. 'Ere's for you a nica, fresha ice-cream cone.

[MRS. FIORENTINO *puts the violin on a chair behind her.*

MRS. JONES (*taking a cone*) : Why, thank you very much, Mr. F.

LIPPO (*going up to the window*) : Meeses Fiorentino, 'ere's for you a nica, fresha ice-cream cone.

MRS. FIORENTINO (*taking the cone*) : It makes me too fat.

LIPPO : Ah, no ! Five, ten poun' more, nobody can tell da deef !

[*He laughs aloud at his own joke and crosses to the stoop.*

MRS. JONES (*enjoying her cone*) : Ain't he a sketch, though ?

LIPPO : Meester Jones, you eata da cone, ha ?

JONES : Why, yeah, I will at that. Thanks. Thanks.

LIPPO : Meester Maurrant ?

MAURRANT : Naw ; I got me pipe.

LIPPO : You lika better da pipe den da ice-cream ? (*Crossing the stoop*) : Meesa Kaplan, nica, fresha cone, yes ?

SHIRLEY : No, thanks. I really don't want any.

LIPPO : Meester Kaplan, yes ?

KAPLAN (*waving his hand*) : No, no ! Tenks, tenks !

MRS. JONES (*to* JONES) : You oughta pay Mr. F. for the cones.

JONES (*reluctantly reaching into his pocket*) : Why, sure.

LIPPO (*excitedly*) : Ah, no, no ! I don' taka da mon'. I'm treata da whole crowd. I deedn' know was gona be such a biga crowd or I bringa doz'. (*Crossing to* OLSEN) Meester Olsen, you lika da cone, ha ?

OLSEN : Sure. Much oblige'.

[*He takes the pipe from his mouth and stolidly licks the cone.*

LIPPO (*seating himself on the stoop, with a long sigh of relaxation*) : Aaah ! (*He tastes the cone and smacking his lips, looks about for approval*) Ees tasta good, ha ?

JONES (*his mouth full*) : You betcha !

MRS. JONES : It cools you off a little.

LIPPO : Sure. Dassa right. Cool you off. (*He pulls at his clothing and sits on the stoop*) I'm a wat, wat—like I jus' come outa da bad-tub. Ees 'ota like hal in da Park. Two, t'ree t'ousan' people, everybody sweatin'—ees smal lika menageria.

[*While he is speaking,* ALICE SIMPSON, *a tall, spare spinster, appears at the right. She goes up the steps, enters the vestibule, and is about to push one of the buttons on the side wall.*

MRS. JONES (*sotto voce*) : She's from the Charities. (*Coming over to the stoop and calling into the vestibule*) If you're lookin' for Mrs. Hildebrand, she ain't home yet.

MISS SIMPSON (*coming to the doorway*) : Do you know when she'll be back ?

MRS. JONES : Well, she oughta be here by now. She jus' went aroun' to the Livingston. That's the pitcher-theayter.

MISS SIMPSON (*outraged*) : You mean she's gone to a moving-picture show ?

OLSEN (*calmly*) : She's comin' now.

LIPPO (*rising to his feet and calling vehemently*) : Mees Hil'brand ! Hurry up ! Hurry up ! Ees a lady here.

[*He motions violently to her to hurry.* LAURA HILDEBRAND *appears at the right, with her two children,* CHARLIE *and* MARY. *She is a small, rather young woman, with a manner of perpetual bewilderment. Both children are chewing gum, and* MARY *comes on skipping a rope and chanting :* "*Apple, peach, pear, plum, banana.*" CHARLIE *carefully avoids all the cracks in the sidewalk.*

MISS SIMPSON (*coming out on the steps*) : Well, good evening, Mrs. Hildebrand !

MRS. HILDEBRAND (*flustered*) : Good evening, Miss Simpson.

MISS SIMPSON : Where have you been ?—to a moving-picture show ?

MRS. HILDEBRAND : Yes ma'am.

MISS SIMPSON : And where did you get the money ?

MRS. HILDEBRAND : It was only seventy-five cents.

MISS SIMPSON : Seventy-five cents is a lot, when you're being dispossessed and dependent upon charity. I suppose it came out of the money I gave you to buy groceries with.

MRS. HILDEBRAND : We always went, Thursday nights, to the pictures when my husband was home.

MISS SIMPSON : Yes, but your husband isn't home. And as far as anybody knows, he has no intention of coming home.

KAPLAN (*leaning forward out of his window*) : Ees dis your conception of cherity ?

SHIRLEY : Papa, why do you interfere ?

MISS SIMPSON (*to* KAPLAN) : You'll please be good enough to mind your own business.

KAPLAN : You should go home and read in your Bible de life of Christ.

MRS. JONES (*to* MRS. FIORENTINO) : Will you listen to who's talkin' about Christ !

MISS SIMPSON (*turning her back on* KAPLAN *and speaking to* MRS. HILDEBRAND) : You may as well understand right now that nobody's going to give you any money to spend on moving-picture shows.

LIPPO : Ah, wotsa da matter, lady ? (*He thrusts his hand into his pocket and takes out a fistful of coins.*) 'Ere, you taka da mon', you go to da

pitcha, ever' night. (*He forces the coins into* MRS. HILDEBRAND'S *hand.*) An' here's for da bambini. (*He gives each child a nickel.*)

MRS. FIORENTINO (*to* MRS. JONES) : Dot's why we never have money.

MRS. HILDEBRAND (*bewildered*) : I really oughtn't to take it.

LIPPO : Sure ! Sure ! I got plenta mon'.

MISS SIMPSON (*disgustedly*) : We'd better go inside. I can't talk to you here, with all these people.

MRS. HILDEBRAND (*meekly*) : Yes ma'am.

[*She follows* MISS SIMPSON *into the house, her children clinging to her.*

MRS. JONES : Wouldn't she give you a pain ?

LIPPO : I tella you da whola troub'. She's a don' gotta nobody to sleepa wit'.

[*The men laugh.*

MRS. JONES (*to* MRS. FIORENTINO) : Ain't he the limit !

MRS. FIORENTINO (*greatly pleased*) : Tt !

LIPPO : Somebody go sleepa wit' her, she's alla right, Meester Jones, 'ow 'bout you ?

[SHIRLEY, *embarrassed, leaves the window.*

JONES (*with a sheepish grin*) : Naw, I guess not.

LIPPO : Wot'sa matter ? You 'fraid you' wife, ha ? Meester Maurrant, how 'bout you ?

[MAURRANT *emits a short laugh.*

MRS. FIORENTINO (*delighted*) : Lippo, you're joost awful.

LIPPO (*enjoying himself hugely*) : Alla ri'. Ahma gonna go myself !

[*He laughs boisterously. The others laugh too.*

MRS. JONES (*suddenly*) : Here's your wife, now, Mr. Maurrant.

[*A sudden silence falls upon them all, as* MRS. MAURRANT *approaches at the left. A swift glance apprises her of* MAURRANT'S *presence.*

LIPPO : 'Allo, Meeses Maurrant. Why you don' come to da concerto ?

MRS. MAURRANT : Well, I was waiting for Rose, but she didn't get home. (*To* MAURRANT, *as she starts to go up the steps*) Is she home yet, Frank ?

MAURRANT : No, she ain't. Where you been all this while ?

MRS. MAURRANT : Why, I've been out looking for Willie.

MAURRANT : I'll give him a good fannin', when I get hold of him.

MRS. MAURRANT : Ah, don't whip him, Frank, please don't. All boys are wild like that, when they're that age.

JONES : Sure ! My boy Vincent was the same way. An' look at him, to-day—drivin' his own taxi an' makin' a good livin'.

LIPPO (*leaning on the balustrade*) : Ees jussa same t'ing wit' me. W'en Ahm twelva year, I run away—I don' never see my parent again.

MAURRANT : That's all right about that. But it ain't gonna be that way in my family.

MRS. MAURRANT (*as* MISS SIMPSON *comes out of the house*) : Look out, Frank. Let the lady pass.

MISS SIMPSON : Excuse me.

[*They make way for her, as she comes down the steps.* MRS. MAURRANT *seats herself on the stoop.*

LIPPO : Meeses Hil'brand, she gotta de tougha luck, ha ? To-morra, dey gonna t'row 'er out in da street, ha ?

Miss Simpson (*stopping at the right of the stoop and turning towards him*) : Yes, they are. And if she has any place to sleep, it will only be because the Charities find her a place. And you'd be doing her a much more neighbourly act, if you helped her to realise the value of money, instead of encouraging her to throw it away.

Lippo (*with a deprecatory shrug*) : Ah, lady, no ! I give 'er coupla dollar, maka 'er feel good, maka me feel good—dat don' 'urt nobody.

[Shirley *reappears at the window.*

Miss Simpson : Yes it does. It's bad for her character.

Kaplan (*throwing away his cigarette and laughing aloud*) : Ha ! You mek me leff !

Miss Simpson (*turning, angrily*) : Nobody's asking your opinion.

Kaplan : Dot's oll right. I'm taling you wit'out esking. You hoid maybe already dot poem :

" Orgenised cherity, measured and iced,
In der name of a kushus, stetistical Christ."

Miss Simpson (*fiercely*) : All the same, you Jews are the first to run to the Charities.

[*She strides angrily off at the right.* Lippo, *affecting a mincing gait, pretends to follow her.*

Kaplan (*leaning out of the window*) : Come back and I'll tal you somet'ing will maybe do good your kerecter.

Mrs. Fiorentino : Lippo !

Mrs. Jones (*highly amused*) : Look at him, will ya ?

Lippo (*laughing and waving his hand*) : Goodabye, lady !

[*He comes back to the stoop.*

KAPLAN (*to the others*) : Dey toin out in de street a mudder vit' two children and dis female comes and preaches to her bourgeois morelity.

MRS. JONES (*to* MRS. FIORENTINO) : He's shootin' off his face again.

SHIRLEY : Papa, it's time to go to bed !

KAPLAN (*irritably*) : Lat me alone, Shoiley. (*Rising and addressing the others*) Dees cherities are notting but anudder dewise for popperising de verking-klesses. W'en de lendlords steal from de verkers a million dollars, dey give to de Cherities a t'ousand.

MAURRANT : Yeah ? Well, who's puttin' her out on the street ? What about the lan'lord here ? He's a Jew, ain't he ?

MRS. JONES : I'll say he's a Jew ! Isaac Cohen !

KAPLAN : Jews oder not Jews—wot has dis got to do vit' de quastion ? I'm not toking releegion, I'm toking economics. So long as de ke*pit*alist klesses——

MAURRANT (*interrupting*) : I'm talkin' about if you don't pay your rent, you gotta move.

MRS. MAURRANT : It doesn't seem right, though, to put a poor woman out of her home.

MRS. FIORENTINO : And for her husband to run away—dot vos not right either.

LIPPO : I betcha 'e's got 'nudder woman. He find a nice blonda chicken, 'e run away.

MRS. JONES : There ought to be a law against women goin' around, stealin' other women's husbands.

MRS. FIORENTINO : Yes, dot's right, Mrs. Jones.

MAURRANT : Well, what I'm sayin' is, it ain't the landlord's fault.

KAPLAN : Eet's de folt of our economic system. So long as de institution of priwate property

exeests, de verkers vill be at de moicy of de property-owning klesses.

MAURRANT : That's a lot o' bushwa ! I'm a woikin' man, see ? I been payin' dues for twenty-two years in the Stage-Hands Union. If we're not gettin' what we want, we call a strike, see ? —and then we get it.

LIPPO : Sure ! Ees same wit' me. We gotta Musician Union. We getta pay for da rehears', we getta pay for da overtime——

SHIRLEY : That's all right when you belong to a strong union. But when a union is weak, like the Teachers' Union, it doesn't do you any good.

MRS. JONES (*to* MRS. FIORENTINO) : Can y' imagine that ?—teachers belongin' to a union !

KAPLAN (*impatiently*) : Oll dese unions eccomplish notting wotever. Oll dis does not toch de fondamental problem. So long as de tuls of industry are in de hands of de ke*pit*alist klesses, ve vill hev exploitation and sloms and——

MAURRANT : T' hell wit' all dat hooey ! I'm makin' a good livin' an' I'm not doin' any kickin'.

OLSEN (*removing his pipe from his mouth*) : Ve got prosperity, dis coontry.

JONES : You said somethin' !

KAPLAN : Sure for de reech is planty prosperity ! Mister Morgan rides in his yacht and upstairs dey toin a voman vit' two children in de street.

MAURRANT : And if you was to elect a Socialist president to-morra, it would be the same thing.

MRS. FIORENTINO : Yes, dot's right, Mr. Maurrant.

JONES : You're right !

KAPLAN : Who's toking about electing presidents ? Ve must put de tuls of industry in de hends of de vorking-klesses and dis ken be accomplished only by a sushal revolution !

MAURRANT : Yeah ? Well, we don't want no revolutions in this country, see ?

[*General chorus of assent.*

MRS. JONES : I know all about that stuff—teachin' kids there ain't no Gawd an' that their gran'fathers was monkeys.

JONES (*rising, angrily*) : Free love, like they got in Russia, huh ?

[KAPLAN *makes a gesture of impatient disgust, and sinks back into his chair.*

MAURRANT : There's too goddam many o' you Bolshevikis runnin' aroun' loose. If you don't like the way things is run here, why in hell don't you go back where you came from ?

SHIRLEY : Everybody has a right to his own opinion, Mr. Maurrant.

MAURRANT : Not if they're against law and order, they ain't. We don't want no foreigners comin' in, tellin' us how to run things.

MRS. FIORENTINO : It's nothing wrong to be a foreigner. Many good people are foreigners.

LIPPO : Sure ! Looka Eetalians. Looka Cristoforo Colombo ! 'E'sa firs' man discov' America —'e's Eetalian, jussa like me.

MAURRANT : I'm not sayin' anythin' about that——

OLSEN (*removing his pipe*) : Firs' man is Lief Ericson.

LIPPO (*excitedly, going towards* OLSEN) : Wassa dat ?

OLSEN : Firs' man is Lief Ericson.

LIPPO : No ! No ! Colombo ! Cristoforo Colomb' —'e'sa firs' man discov' America—ever'body knowa dat !

[*He looks about appealingly.*

MRS. JONES : Why, sure, everybody knows that.

JONES : Every kid learns that in school.

SHIRLEY : Ericson was really the first discoverer——

LIPPO (*yelling*) : No ! Colomb !

SHIRLEY : But Colombus was the first to open America to settlement.

LIPPO (*happily, as he goes back to the stoop*) : Sure, dassa wot Ahm say—Colomb' is firs'.

OLSEN : Firs' man is Lief Ericson.

[LIPPO *taps his forehead, significantly.*

LIPPO : Looka wot Eetalian do for America—'e build bridge, 'e build railroad, 'e build subway, 'e dig sewer. Wit'out Eetalian, ees no America.

JONES : Like I heard a feller sayin' : the Eyetalians built New York, the Irish run it an' the Jews own it.

[*Laughter.*

MRS. FIORENTINO (*convulsed*) : Oh ! Dot's funny !

JONES (*pleased with his success*) : Yep ; the Jews own it all right.

MAURRANT : Yeah, an' they're the ones that's doin' all the kickin'.

SHIRLEY : It's no disgrace to be a Jew, Mr. Maurrant.

MAURRANT : I'm not sayin' it is. All I'm sayin' is, what we need in this country is a little more respect for law an' order. Look at what's happenin' to people's homes, with all this divorce an' one thing an' another. Young girls goin' around smokin' cigarettes an' their skirts up around their necks. An' a lot o' long-haired guys talkin' about free love an' birth control an' breakin' up decent people's homes. I tell

you it's time somethin' was done to put the fear o' God into people !

MRS. JONES : Good for you, Mr. Maurrant !

JONES : You're damn right.

MRS. FIORENTINO : Dot's right, Mr. Maurrant !

MRS. MAURRANT : Sometimes, I think maybe they're only trying to get something out of life.

MAURRANT : Get somethin', huh ? Somethin' they oughtn't to have, is that it ?

MRS. MAURRANT : No ; I was only thinking——

MAURRANT : Yeah, you were only thinkin', huh ?

KAPLAN (*rising to his feet again*) : De femily is primerily an economic institution.

MRS. JONES (*to* MRS. FIORENTINO) : He's in again.

KAPLAN : W'en priwate property is ebolished, de femily will no longer hev eny reason to exeest.

SHIRLEY : Can't you keep quiet, papa ?

MAURRANT (*belligerently*) : Yeah ? Is that so ? No reason to exist, huh ? Well, it's gonna exist, see ? Children respectin' their parents an' doin' what they're told, get me ? An' husbands an' wives, lovin' an' honourin' each other, like they said they would, when they was spliced—an' any dirty sheeny that says different is li'ble to get his head busted open, see ?

MRS. MAURRANT (*springing to her feet*) : Frank !

SHIRLEY (*trying to restrain* KAPLAN) : Papa !

KAPLAN : Oll right ! I should argue vit' a low-kless gengster.

MAURRANT (*raging*) : Who's a gangster ? Why you goddam—— !

[*He makes for the balustrade.*

MRS. MAURRANT (*seizing his arm*) : Frank !

JONES (*seizing the other arm*) : Hey ! Wait a minute ! Wait a minute !

MAURRANT : Lemme go !

SHIRLEY (*interposing herself*) : You should be ashamed to talk like that to an old man !

[*She slams down the window.*

MAURRANT : Yeah ? (*to* MRS. MAURRANT *and* JONES) All right, lemme go ! I ain't gonna do nothin'.

[*They release him.* SHIRLEY *expostulates with* KAPLAN *and leads him away from the window.*

MRS. JONES (*who has run over to the right of the stoop*) : Maybe if somebody handed him one he'd shut up with his talk for a while.

LIPPO : 'E talka lika dat een Eetaly, Mussolini's gonna geeve 'eem da castor oil.

MRS. JONES (*laughing*) : Yeah ? Say, that's a funny idea !

[*Still chuckling, she goes back to the railing at the left of the stoop.*

JONES : No kiddin', is that what they do ?

MRS. FIORENTINO : Yes, dot's true. My husband read it to me in the Italian paper.

MRS. MAURRANT : Why must people always be hurting and injuring each other ? Why can't they live together in peace ?

MAURRANT (*mockingly*) : Live in peace ! You're always talkin' about livin' in peace !

MRS. MAURRANT : Well, it's true, Frank. Why can't people just as well be kind to each other ?

MAURRANT : Then let 'im go live with his own kind.

JONES (*coming down the steps*) : Yeah, that's what

I say. (*As* MRS. JONES *laughs aloud*) What's eatin' you ?

MRS. JONES : I was just thinkin' about the castor oil.

[MAURRANT *seats himself on the right balustrade.*

LIPPO : Sure, 'esa funny fell', Mussolini. (*Doubling up in mock pain*) 'E geeve 'em da pain in da belly, dey no can talk. (*Suddenly*) Look ! 'Eresa da boy. 'Esa walk along da street an' reada da book. Datsa da whola troub' : reada too much book.

[*While* LIPPO *is speaking,* SAMUEL KAPLAN *appears at the left. He is twenty-one, slender, with dark, unruly hair and a sensitive, mobile face. He is hatless, and his coat is slung over one shoulder. He walks along slowly, absorbed in a book. As he approaches the stoop,* SHIRLEY, *in a kimono, appears at the closed window, opens it, and is about to go away again, when she sees* SAM.

SHIRLEY (*calling*) : Sam !

SAM (*looking up*) : Hello, Shirley.

SHIRLEY : Are you coming in ?

SAM : No, not yet. It's too hot to go to bed.

SHIRLEY : Well, I'm tired. And papa's going to bed, too. So don't make a noise when you come in.

SAM : I won't.

SHIRLEY : Good night.

SAM : Good night.

[SHIRLEY *goes away from the window.*

SAM (*to the others, as he seats himself on the curb to the right of the stoop*) : Good evening !

SEVERAL : 'Evening.

LIPPO (*approaching* SAM) : 'Ow you lika da concerto ? I see you sittin' in da fronta seat.

SAM : I didn't like it. Why don't they play some real music, instead of all those Italian organ-grinder's tunes ?

LIPPO (*excitedly*) : Wotsa da matter ? You don't lika da Verdi ?

SAM : No, I don't. It's not music !

LIPPO : Wot you call music—da Tschaikov', ha ?

[*He hums derisively a few bars from the first movement of the Symphonie Pathetique.*

SAM : Yes, Tschaikovsky—and Beethoven. Music that comes from the soul.

MRS. MAURRANT : The one I like is——

[*She hums the opening bars of Mendelssohn's Spring Song.*

LIPPO : Dotsa da Spreeng Song from da Mendelson.

MRS. MAURRANT : Yes ! I love that.

[*She goes on humming softly.*

MRS. FIORENTINO : And the walzer von Johann Strauss.

[*She hums the Wienerwald Waltz.*

MRS. JONES : Well, gimme a good jazz band, every time.

LIPPO (*protesting*) : Ah no ! Ees not music, da jazz. Ees breaka your ear.

[*He imitates the discordant blaring of a saxophone.*

JONES (*bored*) : Well, I guess I'll be on my way.

MRS. JONES : Where are *you* goin' ?

JONES : Just around to Callahan's to shoot a little pool. Are you comin' along, Mr. Maurrant ?

MAURRANT : I'm gonna wait awhile.

[*A* MAN, *with a club-foot, appears at the right and crosses the stage.*

MRS. JONES (*As* JONES *goes toward the right*) : Don't be comin' home lit, at all hours o' the mornin'.

JONES (*over his shoulder*) : Aw, lay off dat stuff ! I'll be back in a half-an-hour.

[*He goes off, at the right.*

A VOICE (*off stage*) : Char-lie !

MRS. JONES : Him an' his pool ! To-morra he won't be fit to go to work, again.

SAM (*who has been awaiting a chance to interrupt*) : When you hear Beethoven, it expresses the struggles and emotions of the human soul.

LIPPO (*waving him aside*) : Ah, ees no good, da Beethoven. Ees alla time sad, sad. Ees wanna maka you cry. I don' wanna cry, I wanna laugh. Eetalian music ees make you 'appy. Ees make you feel good.

[*He sings several bars of Donna é mobile.*

MRS. MAURRANT (*applauding*) : Yes, I like that, too.

LIPPO : Ah, ees bew-tiful ! Ees maka you feela fine. Ees maka you wanna dance.

[*He executes several dance steps.*

MRS. FIORENTINO (*rising*) : Vait, Lippo, I vill give you music.

[*She goes away from the window. The lights go on, in the Fiorentino apartment.*

LIPPO (*calling after her*) : Playa Puccini, Margherita ! *He hums an air from Madame Butterfly. Then as* MRS. FIORENTINO *begins to play the waltz from La Bohème on the piano.*) Ah ! La Bohème ! Bew-tiful ! Who'sa gonna dance wit' me ? Meeses Maurrant, 'ow 'bout you ?

MRS. MAURRANT (*with an embarrassed laugh*) : Well, I don't know. (*She looks timidly at* MAURRANT, *who gives no sign.*)

LIPPO : Ah, come on ! Dansa wit' me ! (*He takes her by the hand.*)

MRS. MAURRANT : Well, all right, I will.

LIPPO : Sure, we hava nica dance.

[*They begin to dance on the sidewalk.*

LIPPO (*to* MAURRANT) : Your wife ees dansa swell.

MRS. MAURRANT (*laughing*) : Oh, go on, Mr. Fiorentino ! But I always loved to dance !

[*They dance on.* SANKEY *appears, at the left, carrying a paper-bag, from which the neck of a ginger-ale bottle protrudes.* MAURRANT *sees him and rises.*

MRS. JONES (*following* MAURRANT'S *stare and seeing* SANKEY) : Look out ! You're blockin' traffic !

SANKEY (*stopping at the left of the stoop*) : I see you're having a little dance.

[MRS. MAURRANT *sees him and stops dancing.* LIPPO *leans against the right balustrade, panting.*

[*The music goes on.*

SANKEY : Say, go right ahead. Don't let me stop you.

MRS. MAURRANT : Oh, that's all right. I guess we've danced about enough.

[*She goes up the steps, ill at ease.*

SANKEY : It's a pretty hot night for dancing.

MRS. MAURRANT : Yes, it is.

SANKEY (*going towards the right*) : Well, I got to be going along. Good night, folks.

THE OTHERS (*except* MAURRANT) : Good night.

LIPPO (*as he seats himself at the left of the stoop*) : Stoppa da music, Margherita !

[*The music stops.*

[SANKEY *goes off, at the right.* MRS. MAURRANT *goes quickly up the steps.*

MAURRANT (*stopping her*) : Who's that bird ?

MRS. MAURRANT : Why, that's Mr. Sankey. He's the milk-collector.

MAURRANT : Oh, he is, is he ? Well, what's he hangin' around here for ?

MRS. MAURRANT : Well, he lives just down the block, somewhere.

MRS. JONES : He's just been down to the drug-store, gettin' some ginger-ale for his wife.

MAURRANT : Yeah ? Well, what I want to know is, why ain't Rose home yet ?

MRS. MAURRANT : I told you, Frank——

MAURRANT : I know all about what you told me. What I'm sayin' is, you oughta be lookin' after your kids, instead of doin' so much dancin'.

MRS. MAURRANT : Why, it's the first time I've danced, in I don't know when.

MAURRANT : That's all right, about that. But I want 'em home, instead o' battin' around the streets, hear me ?

[*While he is speaking,* WILLIE *appears sobbing, at the left, his clothes torn and his face scratched. He is carrying his skates.*

MRS. MAURRANT (*coming down the steps*) : Why, Willie, what's the matter ? (*Reproachfully, as* WILLIE *comes up to her, sniffling*) : Have you been fighting again ?

WILLIE (*with a burst of indignation*) : Well, dat big bum ain't gonna say dat to me. I'll knock da stuffin's out o' him, dat's what I'll do !

MAURRANT (*tensely, as he comes down the steps*) : Who's been sayin' things to you ?

WILLIE : Dat big bum, Joe Connolly, dat's who ! (*Blubbering*) : I'll knock his goddam eye out, next time !

MRS. MAURRANT : Willie !

MAURRANT (*seizing* WILLIE's *arm*) : Shut up your swearin', do you hear ?—or I'll give you somethin' to bawl for. What did he say to you, huh ? What did he say to you ?

WILLIE (*struggling*) : Ow ! Leggo my arm !

MRS. MAURRANT : What difference does it make what a little street-loafer like that says ?

MAURRANT : Nobody's askin' you ! (*to* WILLIE) What did he say ? (*He and* MRS. MAURRANT *exchange a swift involuntary look ; then* MAURRANT *releases the boy.*) G'wan up to bed now, an' don't let me hear no more out o' you. (*Raising his hand.*) G'wan now. Beat it !

[WILLIE *ducks past* MAURRANT *and hurries up the steps and into the vestibule.*

MRS. MAURRANT : Wait, Willie, I'll go with you. (*She goes up the steps, then stops and turns*) : Are you coming up, Frank ?

MAURRANT : No I ain't. I'm goin' around to Callahan's for a drink, an' if Rose ain't home when I get back, there's gonna be trouble.

[*Without another glance or word, he goes off at the right.* MRS. MAURRANT *looks after him for a moment, with a troubled expression.*

MRS. MAURRANT (*entering the vestibule*) : Well, good night, all.

THE OTHERS : Good night.

[SAM *rises. As* MRS. MAURRANT *and* WILLIE *enter the house,* MRS. FIORENTINO *reappears at the window.*

MRS. FIORENTINO : Lippo !

[*She sees that something is wrong.*

MRS. JONES : Say, you missed it all !

[SAM, *about to go up the steps, stops at the right of the stoop.*

MRS. FIORENTINO (*eagerly*) : Vat ?

MRS. JONES (*volubly*) : Well, they was dancin' see ? An' who should come along but Sankey !

MRS. FIORENTINO : Tt ! (*A light appears in the Maurrant apartment.*)

MRS. JONES : Well, there was the three o' them—Mr. Maurrant lookin' at Sankey as if he was ready to kill him, an' Mrs. Maurrant as white as a sheet, an' Sankey, as innocent as the babe unborn.

MRS. FIORENTINO : Did he say something ?

MRS. JONES : No, not till after Sankey was gone. Then he wanted to know who he was an' what he was doin' here. " He's the milk-collector," she says.

MRS. FIORENTINO : It's joost awful.

MRS. JONES : Oh, an' then Willie comes home.

LIPPO : Da boy tella 'eem 'is mamma ees a whore an' Weelie leeck 'im.

MRS. JONES : Well, an' what else is she ?

SAM (*unable longer to restrain himself*) : Stop it ! Stop it ! Can't you let her alone ? Have you no hearts ? Why do you tear her to pieces, like a pack of wolves ? It's cruel, cruel !

[*He chokes back a sob, then dashes abruptly into the house.*

LIPPO (*rising to his feet and yelling after him*) : Wotsa matter you ?

MRS. JONES : Well, listen to him, will you ! He must be goin' off his nut, too.

LIPPO : 'Esa reada too mucha book. Ees bad for you.

MRS. FIORENTINO : I think he is loving the girl.

MRS. JONES : Yeah ? Well, that's all the Maurrants need is to have their daughter get hooked up wit' a Jew. It's a fine house to be livin' in, ain't it, between the Maurrants upstairs, an' that bunch o' crazy Jews down here.

[A GIRL *appears at the left, glancing apprehensively over her shoulder, at a* MAN *who is walking down the street behind her. They cross the stage and go off, at the right.*

MRS. JONES (*as* MRS. OLSEN *comes up the cellar steps and over to the stoop*) : Well, good night.

MRS. FIORENTINO : Good night, Mrs. Jones.

LIPPO : Goo' night, Meeses Jones.

MRS. JONES : Wait a minute, Mrs. Olsen. I'll go with you.

[MRS. JONES *and* MRS. OLSEN *enter the house.* OLSEN *yawns mightily, knocks the ashes from his pipe, and goes down the cellar steps.* WILLIE MAURRANT *leans out of the window and spits into the area-way. Then he leaves the window and turns out the light.* A POLICEMAN *appears, at the right, and strolls across the stage.*

LIPPO (*who has gone up the steps*) : Margherita, eef I ever ketcha you sleepin' wit' da meelkaman, Ahm gonna breaka your neck.

MRS. FIORENTINO (*yawning*) : Stop your foolishness, Lippo, and come to bed !

[LIPPO *laughs and enters the house.* MRS. FIORENTINO *takes the pillow off the window-sill, closes the window, and starts to pull down the shade.* ROSE MAURRANT *and* HARRY EASTER *appear at the left.* ROSE *is a pretty girl of twenty, cheaply, but rather tastefully dressed.* EASTER *is about thirty-five, good looking, and obviously prosperous.*

MRS. FIORENTINO : Good evening, Miss Maurrant.

ROSE (*as they pass the window*) : Oh, good evening, Mrs. Fiorentino.

[ROSE *and* EASTER *cross to the stoop.* MRS. FIORENTINO *looks at them a moment, then pulls down the shade and turns out the lights.*

ROSE (*stopping at the foot of the steps*) : Well, this is where I live, Mr. Easter. (*She extends her hand.*) I've had a lovely time.

EASTER (*taking her hand*) : Why, you're not going to leave me like this, are you ? I've hardly had a chance to talk to you.

ROSE (*laughing*) : We've been doing nothing but talking since six o'clock.

[*She tries gently to extricate her hand.*

EASTER (*still holding it*) : No, we haven't. We've been eating and dancing. And now, just when I want to talk to you—— (*He puts his other arm around her.*) Rose——

ROSE (*rather nervously*) : Please don't, Mr. Easter. Please let go. I think there's somebody coming.

[*She frees herself, as the house-door opens and* MRS. OLSEN *appears in the vestibule. They stand in silence, as* MRS. OLSEN *puts the door off the latch, tries it to see that it is locked, dims the light in the vestibule and comes out on the stoop.*

MRS. OLSEN (*as she comes down the steps*) : Goot evening, Miss Maurrant.

[*She darts a swift look at* EASTER *and crosses to the cellar steps.*

ROSE : Good evening, Mrs. Olsen. How's the baby ?

MRS. OLSEN : She vas cryin' all the time. I tank she vas gettin' new teet'.

ROSE : Oh, the poor little thing ! What a shame !

MRS. OLSEN (*as she goes down the steps*) : Yes, ma'am. Goot night, Miss Maurrant.

ROSE : Good night, Mrs. Olsen. (*To* EASTER) She's got the cutest little baby you ever saw.

EASTER (*rather peevishly*) : Yeah ? That's great. (*Taking* ROSE's *hand again*) Rose, listen——

ROSE : I've really got to go upstairs now, Mr. Easter. It's awfully late.

EASTER : Well, can't I come up with you, for a minute ?

ROSE (*positively*) : No, of course not !

EASTER : Why not ?

ROSE : Why, we'd wake everybody up. Anyhow, my father wouldn't like it.

EASTER : Aren't you old enough to do what you like ?

ROSE : It's not that. Only I think when you're living with people, there's no use doing things you know they don't like. (*Embarrassed*) Anyhow, there's only the front room and my little brother sleeps there. So good night, Mr. Easter.

EASTER (*taking both her hands*) : Rose—I'm crazy about you.

ROSE : Please let me go, now.

EASTER : Kiss me good night.

ROSE : No.

EASTER : Why not, hm ?

ROSE : I don't want to.

EASTER : Just one kiss.

ROSE : No.

EASTER : Yes !

[*He takes her in his arms and kisses her.* ROSE *frees herself and goes to the right of the stoop.*

ROSE (*her bosom heaving*) : It wasn't nice of you to do that.

EASTER (*going over to her*) : Why not ? Didn't you like it ? Hm ?

ROSE : Oh, it's not that.

EASTER : Then what is it, hm ?

ROSE (*turning and facing him*) : You know very well what it is. You've got a wife, haven't you ?

EASTER : What of it ? I tell you I'm clean off my nut about you.

ROSE (*nervously, as the house-door opens*) : Look out ! Somebody's coming.

[EASTER *goes to the other side of the stoop and they fall into a self-conscious silence, as* MRS. JONES *comes out of the house, leading an ill-conditioned dog.*

MRS. JONES (*as she comes down the steps*) : Oh, good evenin'.

[*She stares at* EASTER, *then goes towards the right.*

ROSE : Good evening, Mrs. Jones. It's been a terrible day, hasn't it.

MRS. JONES : Yeah. Awful. (*Stopping*) I think your father's been kinda worried about you.

ROSE : Oh, has he ?

MRS. JONES : Yeah. Well, I gotta give Queenie her exercise. Good night.

[*She stares at* EASTER *again, then goes off at right.*

ROSE : Good night, Mrs. Jones. (*To* EASTER) I'll soon have all the neighbours talking about me.

EASTER (*going over to her again*) : What can they say, hm ?—that they saw you saying good night to somebody on the front doorstep ?

ROSE : They can say worse than that—and what's more, they will, too.

EASTER : Well, why not snap out of it all ?

ROSE : Out of what ?

EASTER (*indicating the house*) : This ! The whole business. Living in a dirty old tenement like this ; working all day in a real-estate office, for a measly twenty-five a week. You're not going to try to tell me you like living this way, are you ?

ROSE : No, I can't say that I like it, especially. But maybe it won't always be this way. Anyhow, I guess I'm not so much better than anybody else.

EASTER (*taking her hand*) : Do you know what's the matter with you ? You're not wise to yourself. Why, you've got just about everything, you have. You've got looks and personality and a bean on your shoulders—there's nothing you haven't got. You've got It, I tell you.

ROSE : You shouldn't keep looking at me, all the time, at the office. The other girls are beginning to pass hints about it.

EASTER (*releasing her hand, genuinely perturbed*) : Is that a fact ? You see, that shows you ! I never even knew I was looking at you. I guess I just can't keep my eyes off you. Well, we've got to do something about it.

ROSE (*nervously snapping the clasp of her handbag*) : I guess the only thing for me to do is to look for another job.

EASTER : Yes, that's what I've been thinking, too. (*As she is about to demur*) Wait a minute, honey ! I've been doing a little thinking and I've got it all doped out. The first thing you do is throw up your job, see ?

ROSE : But——

EASTER : Then you find yourself a nice, cosy little apartment somewhere. (*As she is about to interrupt again*) Just a minute, now ! Then you get yourself a job on the stage.

ROSE : How could I get a job on the stage ?

EASTER : Why, as easy as walking around the block. I've got three or four friends in the show business. Ever hear of Harry Porkins ?

ROSE : No.

EASTER : Well, he's the boy that put on Mademoiselle Marie last year. He's an old pal of mine, and all I'd have to say to him is (*putting his arm around her shoulder*) " Harry, here's a little girl I'm interested in," and he'd sign you up in a minute.

ROSE : I don't think I'd be any good on the stage.

EASTER : Why, what are you talking about, sweetheart ? There's a dozen girls, right now, with their names up in electric lights, that haven't got half your stuff. All you got to do is go about it in the right way—put up a little front, see ? Why, half the game is nothing but bluff. Get yourself a classy little apartment, and fill it up with trick furniture, see ? Then you doll yourself up in a flock of Paris clothes and you throw a couple or three parties and you're all set. (*Taking her arm*) Wouldn't you *like* to be on Broadway ?

ROSE : I don't believe I ever could be.

EASTER : Isn't it worth trying ? What have you got here, hm ? This is no kind of a racket for a girl like you. (*Taking her hand*) You do like me a little, don't you ?

ROSE : I don't know if I do or not.

EASTER : Why, sure you do. And once you get to know me better, you'd like me even more. I'm no Valentino, but I'm not a bad scout. Why, think of all the good times we could have together—you with a little apartment and all. And maybe we could get us a little car——

ROSE : And what about your wife ?

EASTER (*letting go her hand*) : The way I figure it is, she doesn't have to know anything about it. She stays up there in Bronxville, and there are lots of times when business keeps me in New York. Then, in the summer, she goes to the mountains. Matter of fact, she's going next week and won't be back until September.

ROSE (*shaking her head and going towards the stoop*) : I don't think it's the way I'd want things to be.

EASTER : Why, there's nothing really wrong about it.

ROSE : Maybe there isn't. But it's just the way I feel about it, I guess.

EASTER : Why, you'd get over that in no time. There's lots of girls——

ROSE : Yes, I know there are. But you've been telling me all along I'm different.

EASTER : Sure, you're different. You're in a class by yourself. Why, sweetheart—— (*He tries to take her in his arms.*)

ROSE (*pushing him away*) : No. And you mustn't call me sweetheart.

EASTER : Why not ?

ROSE : Because I'm not your sweetheart.

EASTER : I want you to be——

[*A sudden yell of pain is heard from upstairs. They both look up, greatly startled.*

EASTER : My God, what's that—a murder ?

ROSE : It must be poor Mrs. Buchanan. She's expecting a baby.

EASTER : Why does she yell like that ? God, I thought somebody was being killed.

ROSE : The poor thing ! (*With sudden impatience, she starts up the steps.*) I've got to go, now. Good night.

EASTER (*taking her hand*) : But, Rose——

ROSE (*freeing her hand quickly*) : No, I've got to go. (*Suddenly*) Look, there's my father. There'll only be an argument, if he sees you.

EASTER : All right, I'll go.

[*He goes towards the left, as* MAURRANT *appears at the right.*

ROSE (*going up to the top step*) : Good night.

EASTER : Good night.

[*He goes off, at the left,* ROSE *begins searching in her handbag for her latch-key.*

ROSE (*as* MAURRANT *approaches*) : Hello, pop.

MAURRANT (*stopping at the foot of the steps*) : Who was that you was talkin' to ?

ROSE : That's Mr. Easter. He's the manager of the office.

MAURRANT : What's he doin' here ? You been out wit' him ?

ROSE : Yes, he took me out to dinner.

MAURRANT : Oh, he did, huh ?

ROSE : Yes, I had to stay late to get out some letters. You see, pop, the office is closed to-morrow, on account of Mr. Jacobson's funeral——

MAURRANT : Yeah, I know all about that. This is a hell of a time to be gettin' home from dinner.

ROSE : Well, we danced afterwards.

MAURRANT : Oh, you danced, huh ? With a little pettin' on the side, is that it ?

ROSE (*rather angrily, as she seats herself on the left balustrade*) : I don't see why you can never talk to me in a nice way.

MAURRANT : So you're startin' to go on pettin' parties, are you ?

ROSE : Who said I was on a petting party ?

MAURRANT : I suppose he didn't kiss you or nothin', huh ?

ROSE : No, he didn't ! And if he did——

MAURRANT : It's your own business, is that it ? (*Going up the steps*) Well, I'm gonna make it my business, see ? Is this bird married ? (ROSE *does not answer.*) I t'ought so ! They're all alike, them guys—all after the one thing. Well, get this straight. No married men ain't gonna come nosin' around my family, get me ?

ROSE (*rising agitatedly, as the house-door opens*) : Be quiet, pop ! There's somebody coming.

MAURRANT : I don't care !

[BUCHANAN *hurries out of the house. He is a small and pasty young man—a typical, "white-collar slave." He has hastily put on his coat and trousers over his pyjamas and his bare feet are in slippers.*

BUCHANAN (*as he comes down the steps*) : I think the baby's coming !

ROSE (*solicitously*) : Can I do anything, Mr. Buchanan ?

BUCHANAN (*as he hurries towards the left*) : No, I'm just going to phone for the doctor.

ROSE (*coming down the steps*) : Let me do it, and you go back to your wife.

BUCHANAN : Well, if you wouldn't mind. It's Doctor John Wilson. (*Handing her a slip of paper*) Here's his number. And the other number is her sister, Mrs. Thomas. And here's two nickels. Tell them both to come right away. She's got terrible pains. (*Another scream from upstairs.*) Listen to her ! I better go back. (*He dashes up the steps and into the house.*)

ROSE : Oh, the poor woman ! Pop, tell ma to go up to her. Hurry !

MAURRANT : Aw, all right.

[*He follows* BUCHANAN *into the house.* ROSE *hurries off at the left, just as* MAE JONES *and* DICK MCGANN *appear.* MAE *is a vulgar shop-girl of twenty-one ;* DICK, *a vacuous youth of about the same age.* MAE *is wearing* DICK'S *straw hat and they are both quite drunk.*

MAE (*to* ROSE) : Hello, Rose. What's your hurry ?

ROSE (*without stopping*) : It's Mrs. Buchanan. I've got to phone to the doctor.

[*She hurries off.*

DICK (*as they approach the stoop*) : Say, who's your little friend ?

MAE : Oh, that's Rose Maurrant. She lives in the house.

DICK : She's kinda cute, ain't she ?

MAE (*seating herself on the stoop*) : Say, accordin' to you, anythin' in a skirt is kinda cute—providin' the skirt is short enough.

DICK : Yeah, but they ain't any of 'em as cute as you, Mae.

MAE (*yawning and scratching her leg*) : Yeah ?

DICK : Honest, I mean it. How 'bout a little kiss ?

[*He puts his arms about her and plants a long kiss upon her lips. She submits, with an air of intense boredom.*

DICK (*removing his lips*) : Say, you might show a little en-thoo-siasm.

MAE (*rouging her lips*) : Say, you seem to think I oughta hang out a flag, every time some bozo decides to wipe off his mouth on me.

DICK : De trouble wit' you is you need another little snifter.

[*He reaches for his flask.*

MAE : Nope ! I can't swaller any more o' that rotten gin o' yours.

DICK : Why, it ain't so worse. I don't mind it no more since I had that brass linin' put in me stomach. Well, happy days !

[*He takes a long drink.*

MAE (*rising indignantly*) : Hey, for God's sake, what are you doin'—emptyin' the flask ?

DICK (*removing the flask from his lips*) : I t'ought you didn't want none.

MAE : Can't you take a joke ?

[*She snatches the flask from him and drains it, kicking out at* DICK, *to prevent his taking it from her.*

DICK (*snatching the empty flask*) : Say, you wanna watch your step, baby, or you're li'ble to go right up in a puff o' smoke.

MAE (*whistling*) : Phew ! Boy ! I feel like a t'ree alarm fire ! Say, what de hell do dey make dat stuff out of ?

DICK : T'ree parts dynamite an' one part army-mule. Dey use it for blastin' out West.

MAE (*bursting raucously into a jazz tune*) : Da-da-da-da-dee ! Da-da-da-da-dee !

[*She executes some dance steps.*

DICK : Say, shut up, will ya ? You'll be wakin' the whole neighbourhood.

MAE (*boisterously*) : What the hell do I care ? Da-da-da-da-dee ! Da-da-da-da-dee ! (*Suddenly amorous, as she turns an unsteady pirouette.*) Kiss me, kid !

DICK : I'll say !

[*They lock in a long embrace.* SAM, *coatless, his shirt-collar open, appears at the window, watches the pair for a moment, and then turns away, obviously disgusted. They do not see him.*

DICK (*taking* MAE's *arm*) : Come on !

MAE : Wait a minute ! Where y' goin' ?

DICK : Come on, I'm tellin' ya ! Fred Hennessy gimme de key to his apartment. Dere won't be nobody dere.

MAE (*protesting feebly*) : I oughta go home. (*Her hand to her head*) Oh, baby ! Say, nail down dat sidewalk, will ya ?

DICK : Come on !

[ROSE *appears, at the left.*

MAE : Sweet papa ! (*She kisses* DICK *noisily ; then bursts into song again.*) Da-da-da-da-dee ! Da-da-da-da-dee ! (*as they pass* ROSE) Hello, Rose. How's de milkman ?

DICK (*raising his hat with drunken politeness*) : Goo' night, sweetheart.

[*They go off, at the left,* MAE'S *snatches of song dying away in the distance.* ROSE *stands still, for a moment, choking back her mortification.*

BUCHANAN'S VOICE : Miss Maurrant, did you get them ?

ROSE (*looking up*) : Why yes, I did. The doctor will be here right away. And Mrs. Thomas said it would take her about an hour.

[VINCENT JONES *appears at the right and stops near the stoop. He is a typical New York taxicab driver, in a cap.* ROSE *does not see him.*

BUCHANAN'S VOICE : She's got terrible pains. Your mother's up here, with her. (MRS. BUCHANAN *is heard calling faintly.*) I think she's calling me. (ROSE *goes towards the stoop and sees* VINCENT.)

VINCENT : Hello, Rosie.

ROSE : Good evening.

[*She tries to pass, but he blocks her way.*

VINCENT : What's your hurry ?

ROSE : It's late.

VINCENT : You don' wanna go to bed, yet. Come on, I'll take you for a ride in me hack.

[*He puts his arm about her.*

ROSE : Please let me pass.

[SAM *appears at the window. They do not see him.*

VINCENT (*enjoying* ROSE'S *struggle to escape*) : You got a lot o' strength, ain't you ? Say, do you know, you're gettin' fat ? (*He passes one hand over her body.*)

ROSE : Let me go, you big tough.

SAM (*simultaneously*) : Take your hands off her !

[*He climbs quickly out of the window and on to the stoop.* VINCENT, *surprised, releases* ROSE *and steps to the sidewalk.* ROSE *goes up the steps.* SAM, *trembling with excitement and fear, stands on the top step.* VINCENT *glowers up at him.*

VINCENT : Well, look who's here ! (*Mockingly*) Haster gesehn de fish in de Bowery ? (*Menacingly*) What de hell do you want ?

SAM (*chokingly*) : You keep your hands off her !

VINCENT : Yeah ? (*Sawing the air with his hands*) Oi, Jakie !

[*He suddenly lunges forward, seizes* SAM'S *arm, pulls him violently by the right hand down the steps and swings him about, so that they stand face to face. to the left of the stoop.* ROSE *comes down between them.*

Now what o' ya got t' say ?

ROSE : Let him alone !

SAM (*inarticulately*) : If you touch her again——

VINCENT (*mockingly*) : If I touch her again——! (*Savagely*) : Aw, shut up, you little kike bastard !

[*He brushes* ROSE *aside and putting his open hand against* SAM'S *face, sends him sprawling to the pavement.*

ROSE (*her fists clenched*) : You big coward.

VINCENT (*standing over* SAM) : Get up, why don't you ?

ROSE (*crossing to* SAM) : If you hit him again, I'll call my father.

VINCENT (*as* MRS. JONES *and the dog appear at the right*) : Gee, don't frighten me like dat. I got a weak heart.

[*He is sobered, nevertheless.* SAM *picks himself up.*

VINCENT (*as* MRS. JONES *approaches*) : Hello, ma.

MRS. JONES (*with maternal pride*) : Hello, Vincent. What's goin' on here ?

VINCENT : Oh, jus' a little friendly argument. Ikey Finkelstein don't like me to say good evenin' to his girl friend.

ROSE : You'd better keep your hands to yourself, hereafter.

VINCENT : Is dat so ? Who said so, huh ?

MRS. JONES : Come on, Vincent. Come on upstairs. I saved some stew for you.

VINCENT : All right, I'm comin'. (*To* ROSE) Good night, dearie.

[*He makes a feint at* SAM, *who starts back in terror.* VINCENT *laughs.*

MRS. JONES : Aw, let 'im alone, Vincent.

VINCENT (*as he goes up the steps*) : Who's touchin' him ? A little cockroach like dat ain't woit' my time. (*To* ROSE) Some sheik you picked out for yourself !

[*He enters the vestibule and opens the door with his latchkey.*

MRS. JONES (*going up the steps*) : You seem to have plenty of admirers, Miss Maurrant. (*Pausing on the top step*) But I guess you come by it natural.

[ROSE *does not reply.* MRS. JONES *follows* VINCENT *into the house.* ROSE *averts her head to keep back the tears.* SAM *stands facing the house, his whole body quivering with emotion. Suddenly he raises his arms, his fists clenched.*

SAM (*hysterically, as he rushes to the foot of the stoop*) : The dirty bum ! I'll kill him !

ROSE (*turning and going to him*) : It's all right, Sam. Never mind.

SAM (*sobbing*) : I'll kill him ! I'll kill him !

[*He throws himself on the stoop and, burying his head in his arms, sobs hysterically.* ROSE *sits beside him and puts her arm about him.*

ROSE : It's all right, Sam. Everything's all right. Why should you pay any attention to a big tough like that ? (SAM *does not answer.* ROSE *caresses his hair and he grows calmer.*) He's nothing but a loafer, you know that. What do you care what he says ?

SAM (*without raising his head*) : I'm a coward.

ROSE : Why no, you're not, Sam.

SAM : Yes, I am. I'm a coward.

ROSE : Why, he's not worth your little finger, Sam. You wait and see. Ten years from now, he'll still be driving a taxi and you—why, you'll be so far above him, you won't even remember he's alive.

SAM : I'll never be anything.

ROSE : Why, don't talk like that, Sam. A boy with your brains and ability. Graduating from college with honours and all that ! Why, if I were half as smart as you, I'd be just so proud of myself !

SAM : What's the good of having brains, if nobody ever looks at you—if nobody knows you exist ?

ROSE (*gently*) : I know you exist, Sam.

SAM : It wouldn't take much to make you forget me.

ROSE : I'm not so sure about that. Why do you say that, Sam ?

SAM : Because I know. It's different with you. You have beauty—people look at you—you have a place in the world——

ROSE : I don't know. It's not always so easy, being a girl—I often wish I were a man. It seems to me that when you're a man, it's so much easier to sort of—be yourself, to kind of be the way you feel. But when you're a girl, it's different. It doesn't seem to matter what you are, or what you're thinking or feeling—all that men seem to care about it just the one thing. And when you're sort of trying to find out, just where you're at, it makes it hard. Do you see what I mean ? (*Hesitantly*) Sam, there's something I want to ask you—— (*She stops.*)

SAM (*turning to her*) : What is it, Rose ?

ROSE : I wouldn't dream of asking anybody but you. (*With a great effort*) Sam, do you think it's true—what they're saying about my mother ?

[SAM *averts his head, without answering.*

ROSE (*wretchedly*) : I guess it is, isn't it ?

SAM (*agitatedly*) : They were talking here, before—I couldn't stand it any more ! (*He clasps his head and springing to his feet, goes to the right of the stoop.*) Oh, God, why do we go on living in this sewer ?

ROSE (*appealingly*) : What can I do, Sam ? (SAM *makes a helpless gesture*). You see, my father means well enough, and all that, but he's always been sort of strict and—I don't know—sort of making you freeze up, when you really wanted to be nice and loving. That's the whole trouble, I guess ; my mother never had anybody to really love her. She's sort of gay and

happy-like—you know, she likes having a good time and all that. But my father is different. Only—the way things are now—everybody talking and making remarks, all the neighbours spying and whispering—it sort of makes me feel—— (*She shudders.*) I don't know—— !

SAM (*coming over to her again*) : I wish I could help you, Rose.

ROSE : You do help me, Sam—just by being nice and sympathetic and talking things over with me. There's so few people you can really talk to, do you know what I mean ? Sometimes, I get the feeling that I'm all alone in the world and that——

[*A scream of pain from* MRS. BUCHANAN.

ROSE (*springing to her feet*) : Oh, just listen to her !

SAM : Oh, God !

ROSE : The poor thing ! She must be having terrible pains.

SAM : That's all there is in life—nothing but pain. From before we're born, until we die ! Everywhere you look, oppression and cruelty ! If it doesn't come from Nature, it comes from humanity—humanity trampling on itself and tearing at its own throat. The whole world is nothing but a bloodstained arena, filled with misery and suffering. It's too high a price to pay for life—life isn't worth it !

[*He seats himself despairingly on the stoop.*

ROSE (*putting her hand on his shoulder*) : Oh, I don't know, Sam. I feel blue and discouraged, sometimes, too. And I get a sort of feeling of, oh, what's the use. Like last night. I hardly slept all night, on account of the heat and on account of thinking about—well, all sorts of things. And this morning, when I got up, I felt so miserable. Well, all of a sudden, I decided I'd walk to the office. And when I got to the Park, everything

looked so green and fresh, that I got a kind of feeling of, well, maybe it's not so bad, after all. And then, what do you think ?—all of a sudden, I saw a big lilac bush, with some flowers still on it. It made me think about the poem you said for me—remember ?—the one about the lilacs.

SAM (*quoting*) :

" When lilacs last in the door-yard bloom'd
And the great star early droop'd in the western sky in the night,
I mourn'd and yet shall mourn, with ever-returning spring."

[*He repeats the last line :*

I mourn'd and yet shall mourn, with ever-returning spring ? Yes !

ROSE : No, not that part. I mean the part about the farmhouse. Say it for me, Sam.

[*She sits at his feet.*

SAM :

" In the door-yard, fronting an old farmhouse near the white-washed palings,
Stands the lilac bush, tall growing, with heart-shaped leaves of rich green,
With many a pointed blossom, rising delicate, with the perfume strong I love,
With every leaf a miracle—and from this bush in the door-yard,
With delicate colour'd blossoms and heart-shaped leaves of rich green,
A sprig with its flower I break."

ROSE (*eagerly*) : Yes, that's it ! That's just what I felt like doing—breaking off a little bunch of the flowers. But then I thought, maybe a policeman or somebody would see me, and then I'd get into trouble ; so I didn't.

BUCHANAN'S VOICE : Miss Maurrant ! Miss Maurrant !

[SAM *and* ROSE *spring to their feet and look up.*

ROSE : Yes :

BUCHANAN'S VOICE : Do you mind phoning to the doctor again ? She's getting worse.

ROSE : Yes, sure I will. (*She starts to go.*) Wait ! Maybe this is the doctor now.

BUCHANAN'S VOICE (*excitedly as* DR. WILSON *appears at the left*) : Yes, that's him. Mrs. Maurrant ! Tell her the doctor's here ! Doctor, I guess you're none too soon.

DR. WILSON (*a seedy, middle-aged man in a crumpled panama*) : Plenty of time. Just don't get excited.

[*He throws away his cigarette and enters the vestibule. The mechanical clicking of the door latch is heard as* DR. WILSON *goes into the house.*

ROSE : I hope she won't have to suffer much longer.

MAURRANT (*appearing at the window, in his undershirt*) : Rose !

ROSE (*rather startled*) : Yes, pop, I'll be right up.

MAURRANT : Well, don't be makin' me call you again, d'ya hear ?

ROSE : I'm coming right away.

[MAURRANT *leaves the window.*

ROSE : I'd better go up now, Sam.

SAM : Do you have to go to bed, when you're told, like a child ?

ROSE : I know, Sam, but there's so much wrangling goes on, all the time, as it is, what's the use of having any more ? Good night, Sam. There was something I wanted to talk to you about, but it will have to be another time.

[*She holds out her hand,* SAM *takes it and holds it in his.*

SAM (*trembling and rising to his feet*) : Rose, will you kiss me ?

ROSE (*simply*) : Why, of course I will, Sam.

[*She offers him her lips. He clasps her in a fervent embrace, to which she submits but does not respond.*

ROSE (*freeing herself gently*) : Don't be discouraged about things, Sam. You wait and see—you're going to do big things, some day. I've got lots of confidence in you.

SAM (*turning away his head*) : I wonder if you really have, Rose ?

ROSE : Why, of course, I have ! And don't forget it ! Good night, I hope it won't be too hot to sleep.

SAM : Good night, Rose.

[*He watches her, as she opens the door with her latchkey and goes into the house. Then he goes to the stoop and seating himself, falls into a reverie. A* POLICEMAN *appears at the right and strolls across, but* SAM *is oblivious to him. In the distance, a homecomer sings drunkenly. A light appears in the Maurrant hall-bedroom, and a moment later,* ROSE *comes to the window and leans out.*

ROSE (*calling softly*) : Hoo-hoo ! Sam ! (SAM *looks up, then rises.*) Good night, Sam. (*She wafts him a kiss.*)

SAM (*with deep feeling*) : Good night, Rose dear.

[*She smiles at him. Then she pulls down the shade.* SAM *looks up for a moment, then resumes his seat. A scream from* MRS. BUCHANAN *makes him shudder. A deep rhythmic snoring emanates from the Fiorentino apartment. A steam-boat whistle is heard. The snoring in the Fiorentino apartment continues.* SAM *raises his clenched hands to heaven. A distant clock begins to strike twelve.* SAM'S *arms and head drop forward.*

THE CURTAIN FALLS SLOWLY

Daybreak, the next morning. It is still quite dark and comparatively quiet. The rhythmic snoring in the Fiorentino apartment is still heard, and now and then, a distant "L" train or speeding automobile. A moment after the rise of the curtain, JONES *appears, at the right, on his way home from the speak-easy. He reels slightly, but negotiates the steps and entrance door, without too much difficulty. It grows lighter—and noisier. The street light goes out. The* OLSEN *baby begins to cry. An alarm clock rings. A dog barks. A canary begins to sing. Voices are heard in the distance. They die out and other voices are heard. The house-door opens and* DR. WILSON *comes out, passing* JONES *at the top of the stoop.* DR. WILSON *stands on the steps and yawns the yawn of an overtired man. Then he lights a cigarette and goes towards the left.*

BUCHANAN'S VOICE : Doctor !

DR. WILSON (*stopping and looking up*) : Well ?

BUCHANAN'S VOICE : What if she does wake up ?

DR. WILSON (*sharply*) : She won't, I've told you ! She's too exhausted. The best thing you can do is lie down and get some sleep yourself.

[*As he goes off at the left,* MAE *and* DICK *appear. They walk slowly and listlessly and far apart.*

DICK (*as they reach the stoop*) : Well, goo' night.

MAE (*with a yawn, as she finds her latchkey*) : Goo' night. (*Going up the steps and looking towards the Fiorentino apartment*) Aw, shut up, you wop !

DICK (*his dignity wounded*) : How 'bout kissin' me good night ?

MAE (*venomously, from the top step*) ! For God's sake, ain't you had enough kissin' for one night !

[*She enters the vestibule and puts the key in the lock. The ringing of an alarm clock is heard.*

DICK (*raising his voice*) : Well, say, if that's the way you feel about it——

MAE : Aw, go to hell !

[*She enters the house. The alarm clock has stopped ringing.*

DICK : You dirty little tart !

[*He stands, muttering to himself, for a moment, then goes off at the right, passing the* POLICEMAN, *who looks at him suspiciously. The sounds of a Swedish quarrel are heard from the janitor's apartment. The baby is still crying. As the* POLICEMAN *goes left, a* MILKMAN *appears, whistling and carrying a rack of full milk bottles.*

THE POLICEMAN : Hello, Louie.

[*The snoring in the Fiorentino apartment stops.*

THE MILKMAN : Hello, Harry. Goin' to be another scorcher.

THE POLICEMAN : You said it.

[*He goes off at the left.*

[*The* MILKMAN *crosses to the cellar steps.* MAE *appears at the hall bedroom window of the Jones apartment, and removes her dress over her head. The* MILKMAN, *about to go down the steps, sees her and stops to watch.* MAE, *about to slip out of her step-in, sees him, throws him an angry look and pulls down the shade. The* MILKMAN *grins and goes down the cellar steps.* CHARLIE HILDEBRAND *comes out of the house. He is chewing gum and as he comes out to the top of the stoop, he scatters the wrappings of the stick of gum on the stoop. Then he jumps down the four steps of the stoop, in one jump, and goes off at the left, pulling the chewing-gum out in a long ribbon, and carefully avoiding all the cracks in the pavement.* A YOUNG WORKMAN, *carrying a kit of tools and a tin lunch-box, appears at the left, extinguishes the red light on the excavation, and opening the door, goes in. A* TRAMP *comes on at the right and shuffles across. He sees a cigar butt on the*

pavement, picks it up and pockets it, as he exits at the left. ROSE, *in her nightgown, appears at the window, yawns slightly and disappears. It is daylight now. The baby stops crying.* MRS. OLSEN *comes up the cellar steps. She goes up the stoop, turns out the light in the vestibule, and takes the door off the latch. The* MILKMAN *comes up the cellar steps, his tray laden with empty bottles and goes off, whistling, at the left.* SAM, *coatless, a book in his hand, appears at the window. He looks out for a moment, then climbs out on the stoop, looks up at* ROSE'S *window, then seats himself and begins to read.* WILLIE *comes out of the house.*

WILLIE (*chanting, as he comes down the steps*) : Fat, Fat the water-rat, Fifty bullets in his hat.

SAM : Hello, Willie. Is Rose up yet ?

WILLIE (*without stopping or looking at him*) : Yeah. I don't know. I guess so.

[*He turns a somersault and goes off at left, continuing his chanting.* SAM *glances up at* ROSE'S *window again, then resumes his book.* MRS. JONES *and her dog come out of the house.*

MRS. JONES (*haughtily, as she comes down the steps*) : Mornin'.

SAM (*scarcely looking up from his book*) : Good morning.

[MRS. JONES *and the dog go off at the right. A middle-aged* WORKMAN, *carrying a large coil of wire, appears at the left and goes to the door of the excavation.* MRS. OLSEN *comes out of the house and exits into the basement.*

THE WORKMAN (*calling*) : You down there, Eddie ?

A VOICE (*from the depths*) : Yeah !

THE WORKMAN : All right !

[*He climbs down into the excavation.* ROSE *comes to window and pulls up the shade.* WILLIE *and* CHARLIE *can be heard, off stage left, engaged in an earnest conversation.*

CHARLIE (*off stage*) : He could not !

WILLIE (*off stage*) : He could so !

[*They appear at left. Each has under his arm a paper-bag, from which a loaf of bread protrudes.*

CHARLIE : I'll betcha he couldn't.

WILLIE : I'll betcha he could.

CHARLIE : I'll betcha a million dollars he couldn't.

WILLIE : I'll betcha five million dollars he could. Hold that !

[*He hands Charlie his loaf of bread and turns a cartwheel.*) Bet you can't do it.

CHARLIE : Bet I can.

[*He puts both loaves of bread on the pavement, attempts a cartwheel and fails.*

WILLIE (*laughing raucously*) : Haw-haw ! Told you you couldn't !

CHARLIE : Can you do this ?

[*He turns a back somersault.*

WILLIE : Sure—easy !

[*He turns a back somersault. They pick up their loaves again.* WILLIE's *drops out of the bag, but he dusts it, with his hand, and replaces it.*

How many steps can you jump up ?

CHARLIE : Three.

[*He jumps up three steps.*

WILLIE : I can do four.

CHARLIE : Let's see you.

[WILLIE, *the bread under his arm, jumps up the four steps, undisturbed by* SAM's *presence. He drops the bread, and is about to replace it in the bag, but gets a better idea. He inflates the bag and explodes it with a blow of his fist.* CHARLIE *looks on, in admiration and envy.*

ROSE (*appearing at the window*) : Willie, we're waiting for the bread.

WILLIE (*holding it up*) : All right ! Cantcha see I got it ?

[*He enters the house, followed by* CHARLIE.

SAM (*rising*) : Hello, Rose.

ROSE : Hello, Sam.

SAM : Come down.

ROSE : I haven't had breakfast yet. (*Calling into the room*) Yes ! He's on his way up.

MISS CUSHING (*coming out of the house*) : Good morning.

[*She looks inquiringly from* SAM *to* ROSE.

SAM (*impatiently*) : Good morning.

[*A middle-aged nun appears at the right, accompanied by a scrawny child of about fourteen. They walk across the stage.*

ROSE : Good morning, Miss Cushing.

[MISS CUSHING *goes off at the left, glancing back at* ROSE *and* SAM.

ROSE : I'm going to Mr. Jacobson's funeral. (*Calling into the room*) Yes, I'm coming. (*To* SAM) Breakfast's ready. I'll be down as soon as the dishes are done.

[*She disappears.* SAM *looks up at the window, for a moment, then begins to read again.* MRS. FIORENTINO *appears at the window, at the extreme left, with a double armful of bedding, which she deposits upon the window-sill. Then she goes away again.*

SHIRLEY (*appearing at the window*) : Sam, breakfast is ready.

SAM : I don't want any breakfast.

SHIRLEY : What do you mean, you don't want any breakfast ? What kind of a business is that, not to eat breakfast ?

SAM : Do I have to eat breakfast, if I don't want to ?

SHIRLEY : You've got your head so full of that Rose Maurrant upstairs, that you don't want to eat or sleep or anything, any more.

SAM : If I don't feel like eating, why should I eat ? (*Bursting out*) You're always telling me : " Eat ! " " Don't eat ! " " Get up ! " " Go to bed ! " I know what I want to do, without being told.

SHIRLEY : I don't see, just when you're graduating from college, why you want to get mixed up with a little batzimer like that !

SAM : It's always the same thing over again with you. You never can get over your race prejudice. I've told you a hundred times that the Jews are no better than anybody else.

SHIRLEY : I'm not talking about that ! Look at the kind of family she comes from. What's her father ? Nothing but an illiterate rough-neck. And her mother——

SAM (*indignantly*) : Are you starting, too ?

KAPLAN'S VOICE : Shoi-ley !

SHIRLEY : Wait a minute, papa's calling. (*Into the room*) All right, papa ! (*To* SAM) Come in, Sam, or papa will be making long speeches again.

SAM (*impatiently*) : All right ! All right ! I'll come.

[*A young shopgirl, smiling to herself, appears at the right and walks across the stage.* SAM *rises and goes into the house.* SHIRLEY *leaves the window.* BUCHANAN, *emerging from the house, collarless and unshaven, encounters* SAM *in the vestibule.*

BUCHANAN (*eagerly*) : Good morning !

SAM (*abruptly*) : Good morning.

[*He enters the house.* BUCHANAN *looks back at him.*

Then comes down the steps. MRS. FIORENTINO *raises the drawn shade and opens the window.*

MRS. FIORENTINO : Good morning, Mr. Buchanan.

BUCHANAN : Oh, good morning, Mrs. Fiorentino. (*Going over to the left balustrade*) I guess you know that the baby came last night, don't you?

MRS. FIORENTINO : No ! I did not hear a vord about it.

BUCHANAN : Why, I thought she'd wake up the whole neighbourhood, the way she was yelling. Three-thirty this morning, the baby came. I been up the whole night.

[*An old* LETTER-CARRIER, *coatless, appears at the right.*

MRS. FIORENTINO : A boy, is it?

BUCHANAN : No, it's a little girl. I guess we'll call her Mary, after my mother.

LETTER-CARRIER (*going up the steps*) : Mornin'.

MRS. FIORENTINO : Good morning. Any letters for me?

LETTER-CARRIER (*from the top of the steps*) : No, not a thing.

BUCHANAN (*turning toward him*) : I was just telling Mrs. Fiorentino, I had a little addition to my family last night.

LETTER-CARRIER : Your first, is it?

BUCHANAN (*hastening to explain*) : Well, we've only been married a little over a year.

LETTER-CARRIER : Well, I've had seven, an' I'm still luggin' a mail-bag at sixty-two.

[*He goes into the vestibule and puts the mail into the letter-boxes.*

MRS. FIORENTINO : How is your wife?

BUCHANAN : Well, she had a pretty hard time of it. Her sister's up there with her. And Mrs.

Maurrant was up, nearly all night. I don't know what we'd have done without her.

LETTER-CARRIER (*coming down the steps*) : It don't pay to let 'em have their own way, too much. That's where I made my mistake.

[*As the* LETTER-CARRIER *goes off, at the left,* LIPPO *appears at the window behind his wife, and tickles her.*

MRS. FIORENTINO (*startled*) : Lippo !

BUCHANAN : Morning. I was just telling your wife——

MRS. FIORENTINO : Lippo, what do you think ? Mr. Buchanan has a little girl !

LIPPO : Ah, dotsa fine ! Margherita, why you don' have da baby, ha ?

MRS. FIORENTINO (*abruptly*) : I must go and make the coffee.

[*She goes away from the window.* OLSEN *comes half-way up the steps and leans against the railing, smoking his pipe.*

A VOICE (*offstage left*) : Oh-h ! Corn ! Sweet corn !

LIPPO : Ees funny t'ing. You gotta da leetle, skeeny wife an' she's hava da baby. My Margherita, she's beeg an' fat an' she no can hava da baby.

BUCHANAN : Well, that's the way o' the world, I guess.

[*As he goes off, at the left, an* ICE-MAN *appears, trundling a three-wheeled cart, filled with ice.*

LIPPO : Buon giorno, Mike.

MIKE : Buon giorno, signore. Come sta ?

LIPPO : Benissimo. Fa molto caldo ancora, oggi.

MIKE : Si, si, signore. Bisognera abbastanza ghiaccio. Twen'y fi' cent, ha ?

LIPPO : No, no, e troppo.

MIKE : Twen'y cent ? Eesa melta fas'.

LIPPO : Alla right. Gimme twen'y cent.

MIKE : Si, si, signore. Sure.

[*As he wheels the cart to the cellar-entrance and begins to chop a block of ice, a* MAN *in shirt-sleeves strides in from the left and stops at the curb, as though seeing someone in a house across the street.*

THE MAN (*angrily*) : Well, what about it ? We've been waiting a half an hour !

A VOICE : I'll be right over !

THE MAN : Yeah ? Well, make it snappy !

[*He strides off at the left, muttering angrily.* ROSE *comes out of the house and stands in the doorway, looking for* SAM. *Then she comes out on the stoop and peers into the* KAPLAN *apartment. As she turns away, she sees* LIPPO.

ROSE (*crossing to the left of the stoop*) : Good morning.

LIPPO : Gooda mornin', Meesa Maurrant.

[MIKE *goes down into the cellar, with a chunk of ice.*

ROSE : It's awful hot again, isn't it ?

LIPPO : You don' like ?

ROSE : I don't sleep very well, when it's so hot.

LIPPO : No ? Ahm sleepa fine. Een Eetaly, where Ahm born, is much more 'ot like 'ere. Een summer, ees too 'ot for workin'. Ees too 'ot only for sleepin'. W'en Ahm leetla boy, Ahm sleepa, sleepa, whola day. I don't wear no clo's—nawthin' only leetle short pair pants. I lay down on groun' under da lemon-tree, Ahm sleepa whola day.

ROSE : Under a lemon-tree ! That must have been nice.

LIPPO : Ees smella sweet, lemon-tree. Where

Ahm born ees t'ousan' lemon-tree. Lemon an' olive an' arancia.

ROSE : Oh, that must be lovely !

LIPPO : Ah, ees bew-tiful ! Ees most bewtiful place in whole worl'. You hear about Sorrent', ha ?

ROSE : No, I don't think I ever did.

LIPPO (*incredulously*) : You never hear about Sorrent' ?

ROSE : No, I don't know much about geography. Is it a big place ?

LIPPO : Ees not vera beeg—but ever'body know Sorrent'. Sorrento gentile ! La bella Sorrento ! You hear about Napoli—Baia di Napoli ?

ROSE : Oh yes, the Bay of Naples ! Is it near there ?

LIPPO : Sure, ees on Bay of Napoli. Ees bewtiful ! Ees alla blue. Sky blue, water blue, sun ees shine alla time.

ROSE : Oh, how lovely.

[MIKE *comes up the cellar-steps, chops another block of ice, and goes down the cellar-steps with it.*

LIPPO : An' ees Vesuvio, too. You hear about Vesuvio ?—ees beeg volcano.

ROSE : Oh yes, sure. I saw a picture once, called The Last Days of Pompeii, and it showed Mount Vesuvius, with smoke coming out of the top.

LIPPO : Da's right. An' night-time, ees fire come out, maka da sky red.

ROSE : Didn't it frighten you ?

LIPPO : Ah no, ees nawthin' to be afraid. Ees jus' volcano.

ROSE : I'd love to go to Italy. It must be awfully pretty. But I don't suppose I ever will.

LIPPO : W'y sure ! Some day you gonna marry reech fella ; 'e's taka you Eetaly—ever'where.

ROSE : I guess there's not much chance of that. Rich fellows aren't going around looking for girls like me to marry. Anyhow, I don't think money is everything, do you ?

LIPPO : Ees good to hava money. Da's w'y Ahm come to America. Een Eetaly, ees bewtiful, but ees no money. 'Ere ees not bewtiful, but ees plenty money. Ees better to 'ave money.

[*An elderly* MAN, *in the grey uniform of a special officer, comes out of the house, filling his pipe from a tobacco-box.*

THE MAN : Good mornin'.

ROSE : Good morning, Mr. Callahan. (*The* MAN *drops the empty tobacco-tin on the sidewalk and goes off slowly at the left.*) I don't think I'd be happy, just marrying a man with money, if I didn't care for him, too.

LIPPO (*laughing*) : Wotsa matter, ha ? You lova da leetla kike, ha ?

ROSE : Why no, I don't. I don't love anybody—at least, I don't think I do. But it's not on account of his being a Jew.

LIPPO : No, ees no good—Jew. 'E's only t'ink about money, money—alla time money.

ROSE : But Sam isn't like that, a bit. He's only interested in poetry and things like that.

[*The* ICE-MAN *comes up out of the cellar and trundles off his cart at the right.*

MRS. FIORENTINO (*calling*) : Lippo ! Breakfast !

LIPPO (*calling*) : Alla right, Margherita ! (*To* ROSE) You marry fella wit' lot o' money. Ees much better.

[*He goes away from the window, as* MISS CUSHING *appears, at the left, carrying a paper-bag.*

ROSE : How's your mother to-day, Miss Cushing ?

MISS CUSHING : She's not feeling so good to-day.

ROSE : It's too bad she's not feeling well.

MISS CUSHING : I'm afraid it's her heart. At her age, you know—— !

[*As she enters the house, two* COLLEGE GIRLS *of nineteen appear at the right.*

FIRST GIRL (*as they appear*) : I don't understand it.

SECOND GIRL : Convex is this way ; and concave is this way.

FIRST GIRL : That I know.

SECOND GIRL : When you're near-sighted, they give you convex glasses, and when you're far-sighted, they give you concave.

FIRST GIRL : That I didn't know.

SECOND GIRL: Of course, you know it. Didn't we have it in psychology ?

FIRST GIRL (*as they disappear at the left*) : I don't remember.

[WILLIE *comes out of the house, on his way to school. He is hatless, and carries his books under his arm.*

ROSE (*intercepting him at the top of the stoop*) : Why, Willie, the way you look ! Your collar's all open.

WILLIE : I know it ! De button came off.

ROSE : Why didn't you ask ma to sew it on for you ?

WILLIE : She ain't dere. She's up at Buchanan's.

ROSE : Well, wait till I see if I have a pin.

[*She searches in her hand-bag.*

WILLIE (*starting down the steps*) : Aw, it's all right de way it is.

ROSE (*following him to the sidewalk*) : No, it isn't. You can't go to school like that. (*Producing a safety-pin*) : Now, hold still, while I fix it.

WILLIE (*squirming*) : Aw, fer de love o' Mike——!

ROSE : You'll get stuck, if you don't hold still. There, that looks better, now. And you didn't comb your hair, either.

WILLIE (*trying to escape*) : Say, lemme alone, cantcha ?

ROSE (*taking a comb out of her hand-bag and combing his hair*) : You can't go to school looking like a little street-loafer.

WILLIE : Aw, you gimme a pain in de——

ROSE : You're getting big enough to comb your own hair, without being told. There ! Now you look very nice.

WILLIE : So's your old man !

[*He runs towards the left, kicking the empty tobacco tin ahead of him, then stops, turns and deliberately rumples his hair.*

ROSE (*indignantly, as* WILLIE *runs off*) : Why, Willie !

[MRS. JONES *and the dog appear at the right.* OLSEN *knocks the ashes out of his pipe and goes down into the cellar.* MRS. MAURRANT *comes out of the house.*

ROSE : Hello, ma.

MRS. JONES (*at the steps*) : Good mornin'.

ROSE, MRS. MAURRANT : Good morning, Mrs. Jones.

MRS. JONES : How's little Mrs. Buchanan gettin' on ?

MRS. MAURRANT : Well, she's sleeping now, poor thing. She was so worn out, she just went off into a sound sleep. I really didn't think, last night, she'd have the strength to pull through it.

MRS. JONES : Well, it's somethin' we all got to go through. I been through enough with mine, I hope to tell you. Not that they didn't turn out all right.

MRS. MAURRANT : I wouldn't give up having mine for anything in the world.

MRS. JONES : Well, after all, what more does any woman want than watchin' her kids grow up an' a husband to look out for her ?

MRS. MAURRANT : Yes, that's true.

MRS. JONES : Yes, and the world would be a whole lot better off, if there was more that lived up to it. (*Starting up the steps*) Well, I gotta get my Mae up out o' bed. Gawd knows what time she got in, this mornin'. (*She enters the vestibule, then stops and turns.*) If you don't mind my bein' so bold, Mrs. Maurrant—an' I don't mind sayin' it in front of your daughter, either—I'd think twice before I'd let any child o' mine bring a Jew into the family.

ROSE (*with a show of temper*) : I don't see what it has to do with you, Mrs. Jones.

MRS. JONES : There's no need to get huffy about it. I'm only advisin' you for your own good. I'm sure it don't make no difference to me what you do. Come on, Queenie.

[*She goes into the house.*

ROSE : Well, of all the nerve I ever heard in my life—— ! She and those wonderful children of hers !

MRS. MAURRANT (*coming half way down the steps*) : The best way is not to pay any attention to her. There's lots of people like that, in the world—they never seem to be happy, unless they're making trouble for somebody. Did Willie go to school ?

ROSE : Yes, he did. It's awful the way he goes around, looking like a little tough. And the language he uses, too.

MRS. MAURRANT : I know. I just don't seem able to manage him, any more.

ROSE : I sometimes wonder if it wouldn't be better for us all, if we moved out to the suburbs somewhere—you know, some place in Jersey or Staten Island.

MRS. MAURRANT : I don't think pop would do it. (*As* MAURRANT *comes out of the house, carrying a much-battered satchel*) Are you leaving now, Frank ?

MAURRANT (*from the top of the stoop*) : Looks like it, don't it. Where you been all this while ?

MRS. MAURRANT : Why, you know where I've been, Frank—up to Mrs. Buchanan's.

MAURRANT : Yeah ? An' where you goin' now ?

MRS. MAURRANT : Just around to Kraus's to get a chicken. I thought I'd make her some chicken soup, to give her strength.

MAURRANT : Say, how about lookin' after your own home an' lettin' the Buchanans look after theirs.

MRS. MAURRANT : All I'm trying to do is to be a little neighbourly. It's the least anybody can do, with the poor thing hardly able to lift her hand.

MAURRANT : That's all right about that ! (*Coming down the steps*) A woman's got a right to stay in her own home, lookin' after her husband an' children.

MRS. MAURRANT (*going towards him*) : What else have I been doing all these years, I'd like to know ?

MAURRANT : Well, just see that you don't forget it, that's all—or there's li'ble to be trouble.

MRS. MAURRANT (*putting her hand on his arm*) : All right, Frank. Don't say any more, please. When will you be back—to-morrow ?

MAURRANT : I don' know when I'll be back. Whenever I'm t'roo wit' me work—that's when. What are you so anxious to know for, huh ?

MRS. MAURRANT : Why, I just asked, that's all.

MAURRANT : Oh, you just asked, huh ? Just in case somebody wanted to come aroun' callin', is that it ?

MRS. MAURRANT : No, it isn't. It isn't anything of the kind. You got no right to talk to me like that, in front of my own daughter. You got no right. No, you haven't !

[*She turns away and hurries off, abruptly, at the left.*

ROSE : Ma !

[*She starts to run after her mother.*

MAURRANT (*imperiously*) : Come back here, you ! (ROSE *hesitates.*) Come back, hear me ? (ROSE *turns and comes slowly back.*) You stay right here. (*He puts down his satchel and takes a flask from his pocket.*)

ROSE : Why do you talk to her like that ?

MAURRANT : Nobody's askin' you.

ROSE : If you were only a little nicer to her, maybe everything would be different.

MAURRANT : Yeah ? Where's she got any kick comin'. Ain't I always been a good husband to her ? Ain't I always looked after her ?

[*He takes a drink.*

ROSE : It's not that, pop. It's somebody to be sort of nice to her that she wants—sort of nice and gentle, the way she is to you. That's all it is.

MAURRANT (*turning to her*) : So she's got you headed the same way, has she ? Goin' out nights with married men, huh ?

ROSE : You don't need to worry about me, pop. I can take care of myself, all right.

MAURRANT : No daughter o' mine ain't gonna go that way. I seen too many o' those kind around the theaytre.

ROSE : Things are different, nowadays, pop. I guess maybe you don't realise that. Girls aren't the way they used to be—sort of soft and helpless. A girl nowadays knows how to look out for herself. But not her, pop ; she needs somebody to look after her.

MAURRANT : Aw, can all that talk ! You been listenin' to them Bolshevikis, that's the trouble. But I'm gonna keep you straight, by God, or I'll know the reason why.

ROSE : I guess I've got a right to think about things for myself.

MAURRANT : Yeah ? Well, don't let me ketch that other bozo comin' around here, either—that's all I got to say.

ROSE (*hesitantly, going up to him*) : Pop, listen—couldn't we get a little house somewhere—Queens or somewhere like that ?

MAURRANT : What's the idea ?

ROSE : Well, I don't know. I sort of thought it would be nice for all of us. And maybe if ma had a nice little home and some real nice neighbours—do you see what I mean ?

MAURRANT : This place suits me all right.

ROSE : You can get some real nice little houses, that don't cost such an awful lot. And I wouldn't mind helping to pay for it. And once we had it all fixed up——

MAURRANT : Forget it ! I don' know when I'll be back. (*As he starts to go right*) An' remember what I tol' you, hear ?

MRS. JONES (*appearing at her window, with a tin dust-pan*) : Good mornin', Mr. Maurrant. You off on a little trip ?

MAURRANT (*curtly*) : Yeah.

[*He goes off.* MRS. JONES *empties the dust-pan out of the window and goes away.* KAPLAN *comes out*

of the house, a bundle of newspapers under his arm. He walks slowly and painfully, with the aid of a heavy stick.

KAPLAN (*at the foot of the steps*) : Vy do you look so sed, hm ?

ROSE (*turning, and sitting on the right balustrade*) : Oh, good morning, Mr. Kaplan.

KAPLAN : A young girl, like you, should not not look so sed.

ROSE : I'm not sad, especially, only——

KAPLAN : You got troubles, hm ?

ROSE : I don't know. It's just sort of everything.

KAPLAN : Velt-schmerz you got, hm ? Vit' my boy Sem is de same t'ing. Dees vay you feel only ven you are yong. Ven you gat old like me, you tink only : " Moch longer I von't be here."

ROSE : Why should things be the way they are, Mr. Kaplan ? Why must people always be fighting and having troubles, instead of just sort of being happy together.

KAPLAN : My dear yong leddy, ef I could enser dis quastion, I would be de greatest benefactor thet de verld hes ever known. Dees is som't'ing, vich all de philosophers hev been unable to enser. De ones thet believe in God, say de davil is responsible ; and de ones thet don't believe in God, say 'uman nature is responsible. It is my opinion thet most unheppiness can be traced to economic cosses and thet——

[CHARLIE *and* MARY HILDEBRAND *have come out of the house, carrying their school books.*

MARY : Hello.

ROSE : Hello, Mary. Hello, Charlie.

CHARLIE : Hello.

MARY (*chattily, as they reach the side walk*) : We're going to be dispossessed to-day.

ROSE : What a shame !

MARY : Yes, ma'am. My father went away and so we couldn't pay the rent.

CHARLIE (*tugging at her arm*) : Aw, come on, Mary.

ROSE : Have you another place to live, Mary ?

MARY : No ma'am. But Miss Simpson, from the Charities, says she'll find us a place. She says we must learn to be less extravagant.

CHARLIE : Come ahead, will you ?

MARY : I'm going to school now. Good-bye.

ROSE : Good-bye.

[*The children go off, at the left.*

KAPLAN : More trobles !

ROSE : I know. Isn't it awful to think of them being turned out in the street like that ?

KAPLAN : In a ciwilised verld, soch t'ings could not heppen.

ROSE : You mean if there were different laws ?

KAPLAN : Not laws ! We got already too many laws. Ve must hev ection, not laws. De verking-klesses must t'row off de yoke of ke*pit*alism, and ebolish wage-slavery.

ROSE : But wouldn't people still be unkind to each other and fight and quarrel among themselves ?

KAPLAN : My dear young leddy, so long as ve keep men in slevery, dey vill behave like sleves. But wance ve establish a verld based upon 'uman needs and not upon 'uman greed——

ROSE : You mean people will begin being nice to each other and making allowances and all ?

KAPLAN : All dees vill come. Wot ve hev now is a wicious soicle. On de one hend, ve hev a rotten economic system——

ROSE : Excuse me, here's my mother.

[*She goes towards the left, as* MRS. MAURRANT *approaches, a paper package in her hand.* KAPLAN *goes off, at the right.*

MRS. MAURRANT (*as* ROSE *comes up to her*) : Did he go ?

[*They stop on the pavement, at the left of the stoop.*

ROSE : Yes.

MRS. MAURRANT : I got a little chicken, to make Mrs. Buchanan some soup.

ROSE : He had a flask with him, ma. I hope he doesn't start drinking.

MRS. MAURRANT : What did he say—anything ?

ROSE : No, only the way he always talks. I tried to talk to him about buying a house, somewheres, but he wouldn't listen.

MRS. MAURRANT : No, I knew he wouldn't.

ROSE : It doesn't seem to be any use trying to get him to listen to anything.

MRS. MAURRANT : It's always been that way. I've always tried to be a good wife to him, Rose. But it never seemed to make any difference to him.

ROSE : I know, ma.

MRS. MAURRANT : And I've tried to be a good mother, too.

ROSE : I know, ma. I know just the way you feel about it.

MRS. MAURRANT (*appealingly*) : Do you, Rose ?

ROSE : Yes, ma, I do. Honest I do.

MRS. MAURRANT : I've always tried to make a nice home for him and to do what's right. But it doesn't seem to be any use.

ROSE : I know, ma. (*Hesitantly*) But it's on account of—— (*She stops.*)

MRS. MAURRANT : Are you going to start, too ? Are you going to start like all the others ?

[*She turns away and bursts into tears.*

ROSE (*fondling her*) : Don't ma. Please don't.

MRS. MAURRANT : I thought you'd be the one that would feel different.

ROSE : I do, ma—really I do.

MRS. MAURRANT : What's the good of being alive, if you can't get a little something out of life ? You might just as well be dead.

ROSE : Look out, ma. Somebody's coming.

[*A smartly-dressed girl, with one side of her face covered with cotton and adhesive tape, appears at the left and crosses the stage. At the same time,* JONES *comes out of the house.* ROSE *and* MRS. MAURRANT *stand in awkward silence, as he comes down the stoop and approaches them.*

JONES : Well, is it hot enough for you, to-day ?

ROSE : It's awful, isn't it ?

JONES (*as he goes towards the left*) : You said it. Still along about January, we'll all be wishin' we had a little o' this weather.

[*He exits.* MRS. MAURRANT *goes towards the stoop.*

ROSE : Ma, listen, If I say something, will you listen to me ?

MRS. MAURRANT : Yes, sure I will, Rose. I'll listen to anything you say, only——

ROSE : Well, what I was thinking was, if he didn't come around here so much, maybe. Do you see what I mean, ma ?

MRS. MAURRANT (*constrainedly*) : Yes, Rose.

ROSE (*putting her arm around her*) : It's on account of all that's going around—everybody in the whole house. You see what I mean, don't you, ma ?

MRS. MAURRANT : Every person in the world has to have somebody to talk to. You can't live without somebody to talk to. I'm not saying that I can't talk to you, Rose, but you're only a young girl and it's not the same thing.

ROSE : It's only on account of pop. I'm scared of what he's likely to do, if he starts drinking.

MRS. MAURRANT : Well, I'll see, Rose. Sometimes I think I'd be better off if I was dead.

ROSE : If there was only something I could do.

MRS. MAURRANT : There isn't anything anybody could do. It's just the way things are, that's all.

[BUCHANAN *appears at the left. They turn and face him, as he approaches.*

MRS. MAURRANT : Oh, Mr. Buchanan, I got a little chicken, so that I could make her some good, nourishing soup.

BUCHANAN : Well, say, you got to let me pay you for it.

MRS. MAURRANT : Oh, never mind about that. We'll have the chicken for supper to-night. Did you have her medicine made up ?

BUCHANAN : Yes, I got it right here. I called up the office and they told me not to come down to-day.

MRS. MAURRANT : Well, that's very nice. It'll be a comfort to her to have you around.

BUCHANAN : Yes, that's what I thought, too. Well, I'd better be getting upstairs.

[*He goes up the steps.*

MRS. MAURRANT : I'll be up later, with the soup.

BUCHANAN : Well, thanks. (*Stopping at the top of the stoop and turning to her*) You've been a mighty good neighbour, Mrs. Maurrant.

[*He enters the house.*

MRS. MAURRANT : He's an awful nice, young feller—so nice and gentle. And he's always trying to be so helpful. It makes you feel sort of sorry for him.

[SHIRLEY *comes out of the house, carrying a large wicker bag, which contains her lunch and school-books. She takes a post-card out of the mail-box.*

MRS. MAURRANT (*going up the steps*) : Well, I'd better go and start this chicken. Are you coming home for lunch, Rose ?

ROSE : Yes. I'll be back, as soon as the funeral's over.

MRS. MAURRANT : Oh, all right. (*As she sees* SHIRLEY) Good morning.

SHIRLEY (*coming out of the vestibule, reading the post-card*) : Good morning.

ROSE : Good morning.

[MRS. MAURRANT *goes into the house. The shade of Mae's window flies up and she is seen, for an instant, dressed only in her step-in. She yawns noisily and turns away from the window.*

ROSE (*seating herself on the stoop*) : It's another awful day, isn't it ?

SHIRLEY : Yes, and when you have to keep forty children quiet—— ! Well, thank goodness, in two weeks, school closes. Otherwise, I think I'd go crazy.

ROSE : Well, you get a nice, long vacation, anyhow.

SHIRLEY : Not much vacation for me. I'm taking Summer courses at Teachers' College. (*She looks at* ROSE *a moment, hesitates, and then comes down the steps.*) Miss Maurrant, if you don't mind, I want to talk to you about my brother, Sam.

ROSE : Why certainly, Miss Kaplan.

SHIRLEY : I guess you know he's only finishing college, this month——

ROSE : Yes, of course, I do.

SHIRLEY : Then he has to go three years to law-school and pass the bar examination, before he can be a full-fledged lawyer.

ROSE : Yes, it takes a long time.

SHIRLEY : A long time and lots of money. And before a young lawyer begins to make his own living, that takes a long time, too. It will be ten years, maybe, before he's making enough to support himself and a family. (*Looking away.*) Then, it's time enough for him to think about marriage.

ROSE : You don't mean me and Sam, Miss Kaplan ?

SHIRLEY : Yes, that's just what I mean.

ROSE : Why, we're just good friends, that's all.

SHIRLEY : I know how it is with a boy like Sam, Miss Maurrant. He thinks he's a man, already ; but he's nothing but a boy. If you're such a good friend, you shouldn't take his mind away from his work.

ROSE : But I haven't meant to, Miss Kaplan—honest I haven't.

SHIRLEY : I've had to work hard enough to get him as far as he is. And I have my father to take care of, too. The few dollars he makes, writing for the radical papers, don't even pay the rent. Believe me, every dollar I make goes.

ROSE : I know. Sam's often told me how much he owes to you.

SHIRLEY : He doesn't owe me anything. I don't care about the money. Only he should be thinking about his work and not about other things.

ROSE : Yes, he should be thinking about his work. But don't you think there are other things in the world, too, besides just work ?

SHIRLEY : Don't you think I know that ? I know that just as well as you do. Maybe, you think I'm only an old-maid school-teacher, without any feelings.

ROSE : Oh, I don't—really I don't !

SHIRLEY (*turning her head away*) : Maybe I'm not a movie vamp, with dimples—but I could have had my chances, too. Only, I wanted to give Sam an education.

ROSE : I haven't tried to vamp Sam, honestly I haven't. We just seemed sort of naturally to like each other.

SHIRLEY : Why must you pick out Sam ? You could get other fellows. Anyhow, it's much better to marry with your own kind. When you marry outside your own people, nothing good ever comes of it. You can't mix oil and water.

ROSE : I don't know. I think if people really care about each other——

SHIRLEY : He's nothing but a baby. He sees a pretty face and, right away, he forgets about everything else.

ROSE (*with a flash of temper*) : I know I haven't as much brains as Sam, or as you, either, if that's what you mean.

SHIRLEY (*contritely, going towards her*) : I didn't mean to hurt your feelings. I haven't got anything against you. Only, he's all I've got in the world. What else have I got to live for ?

SAM (*appearing at the extreme right window, with a cup of coffee and a piece of coffee-cake*) : Hello, Rose.

ROSE : Hello, Sam.

SHIRLEY (*in a low tone*) : Please don't tell him what I said.

[SAM *goes to the other window.*

ROSE : Oh no, I won't.

[SHIRLEY *hurries off, at the left.*

ROSE (*rising and turning towards Sam*) : Sam——

SAM (*holding out the coffee-cake*) : Want some coffee-cake ?

ROSE : No. (*Going up the steps*) Sam, there's something I want to ask you, before I forget. Is there any special way you have to act in a synagogue ?

SAM (*eating throughout*) : In a synagogue ?

ROSE : Yes. The funeral I'm going to, is in a synagogue, and I thought there might be some special thing you have to do. Like in church, you know, a girl is always supposed to keep her hat on.

SAM : I don't know. I've never in my life been in a synagogue.

ROSE : Didn't you ever go to Sunday-school, or anything like that ?

SAM : No.

ROSE : That's funny. I thought everybody went, once in a while. How about when your mother died ?

SAM : She was cremated. My parents were always rationalists.

ROSE : Didn't they believe in God or anything?

SAM : What do you mean by God ?

ROSE (*puzzled*) : Well—you know what I mean. What anybody means—God. Somebody that sort of loves us and looks after us, when we're in trouble.

SAM (*sitting on the window-sill*) : That's nothing but superstition—the lies that people tell themselves, because reality is too terrible for them to face.

ROSE : But, Sam, don't you think it's better to believe in something that makes you a little happy, than not to believe in anything and be miserable all the time ?

SAM : There's no such thing as happiness. That's an illusion, like all the rest.

ROSE : Then, what's the use of living ?

SAM (*brushing the last crumbs off his hands*) : Yes, what is the use ?

ROSE : Why, you oughtn't to talk like that, Sam—a person with all the talent and brain that you've got. I know things aren't just the way you want them to be. But they aren't for anybody. They aren't for me, either.

SAM : Then, why don't we get out of it, together ?

ROSE : I don't see just how we could do that, Sam.

SAM : It would be easy enough—ten cents' worth of carbolic acid.

ROSE : Why, Sam, you don't mean kill ourselves !

SAM : Is your life so precious to you that you want to cling to it ?

ROSE : Well, yes. I guess it is.

SAM : Why ? Why ? What is there in life to compensate for the pain of living ?

ROSE : There's a lot. Just being alive—breathing and walking around. Just looking at the faces of people you like and hearing them laugh. And seeing the pretty things in the store-windows. And rough-housing with your kid brother. And —oh, I don't know—listening to a good band, and dancing—Oh, I'd hate to die ! (*Earnestly*) Sam, promise you won't talk about killing yourself, any more.

SAM : What difference would it make to you, if I did ?

ROSE : Don't talk like that, Sam ! You're the best friend I've ever had.

[*She puts her hand on his.*

SAM : I can't think of anything but you.

ROSE : There's something I want to ask your advice about, Sam. It's about what I started to tell you about, last night. A man I know wants to put me on the stage.

SAM (*releasing her hand and drawing back*) : What man ?

ROSE : A man that works in the office. He knows a manager and he says he'll help me get started. You see, what I thought was, that if I could only get out of here and have a decent place to live and make a lot of money, maybe everything would be different, not only for me, but for ma and pop and Willie.

SAM : But don't you know what he wants, this man ?

ROSE : Nobody gives you anything for nothing, Sam. If you don't pay for things in one way, you do in another.

SAM : Rose, for God's sake, you mustn't !

[VINCENT JONES *comes out of the house.*

ROSE (*seeing* VINCENT *in the vestibule*) : Look out, Sam, here's that tough, from upstairs.

[*She goes over to the left of the stoop.*

VINCENT (*in the doorway*) : Hello, Rosie. Been here, all night, talkin' to the little yit ?

[ROSE *does not answer.*

VINCENT (*turning to* SAM) : Hello, motzers ! Shake !

[*He leans over the balustrade and seizes* SAM's *hand in a crushing grip.*

SAM (*writhing with pain*) : Let me go !

ROSE : Let him alone !

[VINCENT *gives* SAM's *hand another vicious squeeze and then releases him.* SAM *cowers back in the window nursing his hand.*

VINCENT (*waving his hand about in mock pain*) : Jesus, what a grip dat little kike's got ! I'd hate to get into a mix-up wit' him. (*To* ROSE) Got a date for to-night, kid ?

ROSE : Yes, I have.

VINCENT : Yeah ? Gee, ain't dat too bad. I'll give you two dollars, if you let me snap your garter.

ROSE : Shut up, you !

[VINCENT *laughs.* SAM *makes an inarticulate sound.*

VINCENT (*threateningly*) : Whadja say ? I t'ought I hoid you say sumpin.

[*He makes a threatening gesture.* SAM *shrinks back.*

VINCENT (*with a loud laugh, as he goes down the steps*) : Fightin' Kaplan, de pride o' Jerusalem ! (*He looks at them both, then laughs again.*) Fer cryin' out loud !

[*He goes off at the left.*

ROSE : Oh, if there was only some way of getting out of here ! (SAM *puts the back of his hand to his forehead and turns away.*) I sometimes think I'd just like to run away.

SAM (*without turning*) : Yes !

ROSE : Anywhere—it wouldn't matter where—just to get out of this.

SAM (*turning*) : Why shouldn't we do it ?

ROSE (*rather startled, coming over to the right balustrade*) : Would you go with me, Sam ?

SAM : Yes—anywhere.

ROSE : I've heard that people are much nicer and friendlier, when you get outside of New York. There's not so much of a mad rush, other places. And being alone, you could sort of work things out for yourself. (*Suddenly*) Only, what would you do, Sam ?

SAM : I could get a job, too.

ROSE : And give up your law work ?

SAM : I'd give up everything, to be with you.

ROSE : No. I wouldn't let you do that, Sam. It's different with me——

[EASTER *appears at the right.*

EASTER (*stopping at the right of the stoop*) : Good morning, Miss Maurrant.

[*Startled,* ROSE *turns and sees him, for the first time.*

ROSE (*none too pleased*) : Oh, good morning, Mr. Easter. What brings you in this neighbourhood ?

EASTER (*not very plausibly*) : Well, I just happened to have a little business, right around the corner. So, I thought as long as you were going to the funeral, we might just as well go together.

ROSE : Well, I hardly expected to see you around here. (*An awkward pause.*) Oh, I'd like you to meet my friend, Mr. Kaplan.

EASTER : How do you do, Mr. Kaplan ? Glad to know you.

[SAM *murmurs something inaudible. An awkward silence.*

ROSE (*to* SAM) : Mr. Easter is the manager of the office.

[SAM *does not reply. Another silence.*

ROSE (*to* EASTER) : It's awful hot again, isn't it ?

EASTER : Worse than yesterday. (*Approaching the stoop*) Tell you what I was thinking. I was thinking that, after the funeral, we might take a run down to the beach, somewhere, and cool off a little.

ROSE : I can't to-day. I've got a lot of things I want to do.

EASTER : Oh, you can do 'em some other day.

ROSE : No, really, I can't. (*Looking at her watch*) Well, I guess it's time we got started.

[*She comes down the steps.*

EASTER : Yes, it is. We'll pick up a cab at the corner.

[MRS. MAURRANT *appears at her window, looks out, and sees* ROSE *and* EASTER.

ROSE : Why, I thought I'd walk. It's not far.

EASTER : Too hot, to-day, for any walking.

ROSE (*starting to go towards the left*) : Not if you keep in the shade.

EASTER : Much more comfortable taking a cab.

ROSE : I'd rather walk.

EASTER : Well, whatever you say. Good morning, Mr. Kaplan. Glad to have met you.

[SAM *murmurs an inaudible reply.*

ROSE : Good-bye, Sam. I'll see you, later.

[SAM *does not answer.* ROSE *and* EASTER *go towards the left in silence.* SAM *watches them intently, trembling with jealousy.* MRS. MAURRANT, *surprised and disturbed, watches* ROSE *and* EASTER.

ROSE (*to* EASTER, *as they disappear*) : It's a lucky thing my father wasn't around.

[SAM *suddenly turns and goes into the house.* MRS. MAURRANT *remains at the window, looking out, with obvious expectancy.*

A DISTANT VOICE (*off-stage left*) : *Straw*-berries ! Straw-*berries* !

[*An anæmic girl of eighteen, with a music-roll under her arm, appears at the left. She enters the house and pushes one of the buttons in the vestibule, then goes to the entrance-door and waits. A moment later,* MRS. FIORENTINO *appears hastily at the window, and whisks away the bedclothes. After another moment, the latch clicks and the girl enters the house.*

THE VOICE (*a little nearer*) : *Oh-h ! Straw*-berries ! Straw-*berries* !

[SANKEY *appears at the right. He carries a pencil behind his ear, wears a round cap with a metal name-plate and a stiff visor, and carries a large black-covered bill-holder. He and* MRS. MAURRANT *see each other and both become tense with excitement.* MRS. MAURRANT *beckons to him and he comes over to the railing under her window.*

MRS. MAURRANT (*in a low, tense voice*) : Come up.

SANKEY (*looking about nervously*) : Now ?

MRS. MAURRANT : Yes. I got to talk to you.

SANKEY : Is it all right ?

MRS. MAURRANT : Yes. He's gone to Stamford.

SANKEY : How about later ?

MRS. MAURRANT : No. Rose'll be home in a hour. She's not working to-day.

SANKEY : All right.

[*He looks about again, then goes quickly towards the steps.* SAM *appears at the entrance-door. He is about to step out, when he sees* SANKEY. *He stops and looks at him.* SANKEY *sees* SAM, *hesitates a moment, then goes quickly into the house. Meanwhile,* MRS. MAURRANT *has closed both windows and pulled down the shades.* SAM *takes a periodical out of the mail-box, then comes out of the house and down the steps. He looks up at the Maurrant windows, sees the drawn shades, and looks about, in perturbed perplexity, not knowing what to do. At length, he sits down on the steps of the stoop, tears the wrapper off the periodical—"The Nation"—and begins to read. The girl in Lippo's apartment begins playing the piano. This continues throughout the scene. Two untidy and rather coarse-looking men appear at the left, and approach the stoop :* JAMES HENRY, *a city-marshal, and* FRED CULLEN, *his assistant. They stop in front of the house.* SAM *pays no attention to them.*

THE MARSHAL (*crossing to the left of the stoop, and taking a paper from his pocket*) : Dis is it. (*To* SAM) : Hildebrand live here ?

SAM (*startled*) : What ?

THE MARSHAL : I'm askin' you if Hildebrand lives here.

SAM : Yes. Fourth floor.

THE MARSHAL : Better give de janitor a buzz, Fred.

[FRED *goes up the steps and rings the janitor's bell, then leans over the left balustrade.*

FRED (*bawling*) : Hey, janitor.

OLSEN (*below*) : Vell ?

FRED : Come on out, a minute. (*As* OLSEN *appears below*) : We got a warrant for Hildebrand.

OLSEN : Fourt' floor—Hildebrand.

FRED : Yeah, I know. We got a warrant for her.

THE MARSHAL : I'm City Marshal Henry. We got a dispossess warrant.

OLSEN (*coming up the steps*) : Oh, sure. You gonna put 'em out ?

THE MARSHAL : Yeah, dat's it. Has she got anybody to take de foinicher away ?

OLSEN (*with a shrug*) : I don' know.

THE MARSHAL : Well, we'll have t' dump it on de side walk, den. Go ahead, Fred.

[*They enter the house.* OLSEN *leans his elbows on the coping, and smokes his pipe.* SAM *sits on the steps, deep in troubled thought. A grocery boy, with a full basket, appears at the right, and goes down the cellar steps.* MAE JONES *comes out of the house. She stands on the top step, yawns noisily, and goes off at left. She and* SAM *do not pay the slightest attention to each other.*

A VOICE (*a little nearer*) : *Straw*-berries ! Straw-*berries* !

[MRS. OLSEN *comes up the cellar steps with a heavy pail of water.* OLSEN *leans forward to make room for her. She staggers over to the stoop, almost dropping the pail, and goes up the steps, into the vestibule.* OLSEN *yawns and goes down into the cellar.* MRS. JONES *appears at the window, her hair wet and stringy, a towel pinned about her shoulders, and leans out to dry her hair.*

AN OLD-CLOTHES MAN (*appearing at left*) : I kesh ko ! I kesh ko !

[*He wears a battered derby and carries a folded newspaper under his arm.* MRS. OLSEN, *on her knees, begins washing up the vestibule.* FRED *comes out of the house, carrying a worn chair and a large gilt-framed picture, which he deposits on the side walk, against the railing, to the left of the stoop.*

THE OLD-CLOTHES MAN (*as if to someone across the street*) : Kesh ko ? (*To* SAM) Any old klose, mister ?

[SAM *pays no attention to him.*

FRED *re-enters the house.*

THE OLD-CLOTHES MAN (*to* MRS. JONES) : Any ol' klose, leddy ?

MRS. JONES : Naw, nawthin'.

THE OLD-CLOTHES MAN : Hets ? Shoes ? Ol' stockings ?

MRS. JONES : Nawthin', I tell you.

[*As the* OLD-CLOTHES MAN *goes off, at the right,* MAURRANT *appears, still carrying his satchel.*

MRS. JONES : Why, hello, Mr. Maurrant. (MAURRANT *looks up without replying and comes over to the stoop.*) I thought you was off to Stamford.

MAURRANT : I changed me——

[*He stops to the right of the stoop, and looks up at the drawn shades of his apartment.* SAM *rises slowly and rigidly, his eyes glued in fascination upon* MAURRANT. MAURRANT'S *movements take on a lithe and*

cat-like quality. Then, slowly and deliberately, he goes towards the steps, his back arched, like a tiger ready to spring.

SAM (*suddenly blocking the steps*) : No ! No ! For God's sake—— !

MAURRANT (*raging*) : Out o' me way, you goddam little rat !

[*He flings* SAM *violently aside, almost knocking him down.* MRS. OLSEN, *terrified, rises and shrinks into a corner, as* MAURRANT, *with swift stealthiness, enters the house.* MRS. JONES *leans out to see what is wrong.* SAM *rushes down the steps and stands under the Maurrant windows. The* MARSHAL *comes out of the house, carrying a wash-boiler, filled with pots.*

SAM (*hysterically*) : Mrs. Maurrant ! Mrs. Maurrant !

MRS. JONES : What's the matter ?

[*The* MARSHAL *puts the wash-boiler on the balustrade, and looks on in amazement.*

SAM (*to* MRS. JONES) : Quick ! Run and tell her ! Quick !

MRS. JONES : What is it ? (*Suddenly*) Oh, Gawd, is he in there ?

[*She leaves the window hastily.*

SAM : Yes ! Mrs. Maurrant ! Mrs. Maurrant !

[*A scream of terror is heard from the Maurrant apartment.*

MRS. MAURRANT'S VOICE : Frank ! Frank !

[*Two shots are heard in quick succession, and then a heavy fall.* MRS. OLSEN *runs out of the vestibule and down into the cellar.* SANKEY'S *voice is heard, inarticulate with fear. Then, one of the shades shoots up, and* SANKEY *appears at the window coatless, his face deformed by terror. He tries to open the window, but succeeds only in shattering the pane with his elbow.* MAURRANT *appears behind him and pulls*

him away from the window. Then another shot is heard.

THE MARSHAL : For Chris' sake, what's happenin' ? Get an ambulance, you !

[*He pushes* SAM *towards the left, then hurries off, at the right. As* SAM *runs off, a crowd begins to form.* OLSEN *comes up from the cellar, followed by the* GROCERY BOY. *The two workmen come up out of the excavation.*

Two or three of the workmen from the demolished building, run on at the right.

A WORKMAN : What's happening ?

A MAN : What is it ? A murder ?

[*Still others join the crowd : A huckster, a janitor from a neighbouring house, a mulatto girl, six or eight women of the neighbourhood, some in street-dresses, others in house-dresses or dingy wrappers.* LIPPO'S *pupil appears at the window, badly frightened. The crowd surges about uncertainly, not knowing what has happened, and buzzing with questions, which nobody can answer. While the crowd is still forming,* FRED *the* MARSHAL'S *assistant, appears at the broken window.*

FRED (*excitedly*) : Grab dat boid ! He's comin' down !

A WORKMAN : What boid ?

A MAN : Here he is, now !

[*The crowd murmurs with excitement and surges about the stoop, as the house-door opens and* MAURRANT *appears. His coat is open and his shirt is torn almost to shreds. His face, hands and clothing are covered with blood. He stands in the doorway for a moment surveying the crowd, his eyes glaring.*

FRED : Grab him ! Don't let him get away !

[*As the crowd makes a concerted movement towards* MAURRANT, *he whips out an automatic revolver and levels it. The crowd shrinks back. Some of the women scream.*

MAURRANT : Git back ! Git back, all o' you !

[*The crowd falls back towards the left, to make way for him. With his back to the balustrade, he comes quickly down the steps, and still levelling his revolver at the crowd, retreats backwards to the cellar steps. A man, approaching at the right, comes stealthily up behind him, but* MAURRANT *senses his presence in time, wheels quickly, menaces the man with his revolver, then rushes down the cellar steps. While all this is happening, the other shade in the Maurrant apartment flies up and* MISS CUSHING *opens the window and leans out.*

MISS CUSHING : Hurry up ! Get an ambulance !

[*No one pays any attention to her, as they are all watching* MAURRANT. *As* MAURRANT *runs down the cellar steps, the crowd surges forward to the railing on both sides of the stoop, and leans over. A scream from* MRS. OLSEN *is heard from the basement.* FRED *goes away from the window.*

MISS CUSHING : Get an ambulance, somebody !

[*Unable to attract anyone's attention, she leaves the window.*

OLSEN : Olga !

[*He hurries down the cellar steps.*

A MAN (*calling*) : Here's a cop ! (*The crowd looks to the right.*) Hey ! Hurry up !

[*A* POLICEMAN *runs on from the right.*

THE POLICEMAN : Where is he ?

VOICES IN THE CROWD : He's down the cellar ! He ran down the cellar ! He went down the steps !

THE POLICEMAN : Get out of the way !

[*The* POLICEMAN *and two men in the crowd go down the cellar steps.*

VOICES IN THE CROWD : Watch yourself ! Look out, he's got a gun ! He's a big guy with his shirt torn !

[*The rest of the crowd peers over the railing.*

MISS CUSHING (*leaning out of* ROSE'S *window*) : Hey, don't you hear me ? Get an ambulance !

ANOTHER MAN (*looking up*) : What's de matter ? You want de ambulance ?

MISS CUSHING : Yes ! Right away !

ANOTHER MAN (*to the* GROCERY BOY) : Run aroun' de corner to de horspital, Johnny, an' tell 'em to send de ambulance !

THE GROCERY BOY : Sure !

MISS CUSHING : Run !

[*The* GROCERY BOY *runs off swiftly at the ieft.* MISS CUSHING *leaves the window. Meanwhile, as the* POLICEMAN *and the two* MEN *have gone down the cellar steps, the* MARSHAL *has run on from the right, panting.*

THE MARSHAL (*as the* GROCERY BOY *runs off*) : Did dey git 'm ?

A MAN : He beat it down de cellar.

A WORKMAN : De cop's gone after him.

THE MARSHAL : Why de hell didn' you stop 'im ?

[FRED *comes out of the house.*

A WORKMAN : He had a gun.

FRED : Did somebody go for de ambulance ?

A MAN : Yeah. De kid went.

A WOMAN : It's only aroun' de corner.

ANOTHER MAN : Dey'll be here, right away.

[*The crowd moves over towards* FRED.

THE MARSHAL (*pushing his way through the crowd and up the steps*) : What de hell happened, Fred ?

FRED (*as the crowd moves toward the stoop*) : It's a moider. Dis boid's wife an' some other guy. Jesus, you oughta see de blood.

[*Another* POLICEMAN *runs up at the left, closely followed by* SAM.

FRED : Upstairs, officer ! Dere's two of 'em got shot.

THE POLICEMAN (*elbowing his way through the crowd*) : Look out o' de way, youse ! (*He goes up the stoop and crosses to the door.*) Where's de guy dat did it ?

VOICES IN THE CROWD : Down de cellar ! He beat it down de steps !

FRED : Dere's another cop after 'im. You better look after dem, upstairs. Foist floor.

SAM (*agonised*) : Are they dead ?

[*No one pays any attention to him.*

THE MARSHAL (*stopping the* POLICEMAN, *and exhibiting his badge*) : I'm City Marshal Henry. Kin I do anythin' ?

POLICEMAN : Don' let anybody in or out ! Hear ?

THE MARSHAL : Yeah, sure !

[*The* POLICEMAN *exits quickly into the house.*

SAM : Are they dead ?

[*No one notices him. The* MARSHAL *takes up his position in the doorway.*

BUCHANAN (*appearing at the Maurrant window*) : Where's the ambulance ?

THE MARSHAL : It'll be here, right away. Dere's a cop on his way up.

SAM : Mr. Buchanan ! Mr. Buchanan ! Are they dead ?

[*But* BUCHANAN *has already disappeared. The two* MEN, *who followed the first* POLICEMAN *into the cellar, now come up the steps. The crowd moves over to the railing at the right.*

THE MARSHAL : Did you get him, boys ?

ONE OF THE MEN : He must be hidin' somewheres. De cop's lookin' for 'im.

ANOTHER MAN : Somebody better call de resoives.

[SAM *runs up the steps and tries to enter the house.*

THE MARSHAL (*seizing him roughly*) : You can't get in now ! Get back dere !

[*He pushes* SAM *back into the crowd at the foot of the steps.*

THE POLICEMAN (*appearing at the Maurrant window*) : Hey, call up headquarters an' tell 'em to send the resoives. Make it quick !

[*He goes away from the window.*

THE MARSHAL : You go, Fred.

FRED : Sure !

A MAN : Dere's a phone in de warehouse.

[*An ambulance bell is heard at the left, as* FRED *goes quickly towards the left. Another spectator hurries on and joins the crowd.*

VOICES IN THE CROWD : Dere it is ! Dere's de ambulance now ! Here dey come !

[*The crowd moves over towards the left.*

A MAN : Dey won't be able to git past.

THE POLICEMAN (*reappearing at the window*) : Is dat de ambulance ?

THE MARSHAL : Yeah.

[BUCHANAN *and* MRS. JONES *crowd to the window, behind the* POLICEMAN, *and, at the other window,* LIPPO, MISS CUSHING *and* MRS. HILDEBRAND *appear. A hospital interne and an ambulance driver come on at the left.*

THE POLICEMAN : Hurry up, Doc ! She's still breathin'.

THE INTERNE (*forcing his way through the crowd*) : All right ! Better bring the stretcher, Harry.

THE AMBULANCE DRIVER : Yes, sir.

[*He hurries off at the left. The* INTERNE *goes quickly into the house. The crowd attempts to follow, several of its members going up the steps.*

THE MARSHAL (*pushing them back*) : Keep back, now ! Back off de stoop, everybody !

[*The crowd forms a compact mass about the foot of the steps. The persons at the Maurrant windows have disappeared.* FRED *hurries on at the left.*

FRED (*pushing his way through the crowd and up the steps*) : I got 'em. Dey'll be right up. Anudder cop jes' wen' in t'roo de warehouse cellar.

THE MARSHAL : Dey'll git 'im all right. (*Looking at his watch*) Better git busy wit' dat foinicher, Fred. We got two udder jobs to-day.

FRED : Yeah, sure, Jimmy.

[*He enters the house. The* AMBULANCE DRIVER *appears at the left, carrying a canvas stretcher.*

THE AMBULANCE DRIVER : Get out o' the way !

THE MARSHAL : Git back, can't youse ? What de hell's de matter wit' youse ?

[*He comes down the steps and violently pushes the crowd back. The* AMBULANCE DRIVER *enters the house.*

THE POLICEMAN (*at the window*) : Are dey bringin' dat stretcher ?

THE MARSHAL : On de way up ! (*To the crowd*) Keep back !

[*The* POLICEMAN *leaves the window.*

LIPPO'S *pupil, her music-roll under her arm, appears timidly in the doorway.*

THE MARSHAL (*grabbing her arm roughly*) : Where you goin' ?

THE GIRL (*nervously*) : I'm going home.

THE MARSHAL : Home ? Where do you live ?

THE GIRL : Ninety-first Street.

THE MARSHAL : What are you doin' here ?

THE GIRL : I just came for a music lesson, that's all.

THE MARSHAL : Yeah ? Well, you can't go now.

THE GIRL (*beginning to whimper*) : I want to go home.

THE MARSHAL : You can't go, now. Nobody can't leave de house, now.

THE POLICEMAN (*coming out of the house*) : Who's dis kid ?

THE MARSHAL : Says she come here to take a music lesson an' she wants to go home.

THE POLICEMAN (*to the girl*) : Do you know anythin' about this killin' ?

THE GIRL : No, I don't. I just heard some shooting, that's all. My mother will be worried, if I don't come home.

THE POLICEMAN : Well, you can't go, now. Get inside dere, out o' de way. Dey'll be bringin' her down, in a minute.

[*He pushes the girl inside the house and comes down the steps.*

THE POLICEMAN : Come on, git back from dem steps ! Back now, all o' youse !

[*He and the* MARSHAL *push the crowd back to the right of the stoop, leaving the steps and the side walk in front of them clear. Then he goes up the steps again.*

THE MARSHAL : What did he do ? Shoot two of 'em ?

THE POLICEMAN : I'll say he did ! His wife an' her sweetie. A guy named Sankey. He was dead when I got up dere.

THE MARSHAL : I seen him tryin' to climb out t'roo de winder. An' dis guy grabs 'im an' pulls 'im back.

THE INTERNE (*from the Maurrant window*) : Officer ! Come on up !

[*He leaves the window, as the* POLICEMAN *exits into the house. Suddenly,* SAM *utters an exclamation of anguish and, pushing his way out of the crowd, hurries over to the left.*

THE MARSHAL : Hey, you ! Where you goin' ?

[SAM *ignores him and hurries on.*

A WOMAN : Look ! There's the Maurrant girl !

ANOTHER WOMAN : Who ?

A WOMAN : It's her daughter.

[*The crowd murmurs excitedly, as* ROSE *comes on quickly at the left.*

ROSE : What's the matter, Sam ? What's the ambulance for ? Did anybody get hurt ?

SAM : Go away, Rose. Go away.

ROSE : Who is it, Sam ? What's the matter ? Is it my mother ? It's not my mother, is it ? (*Clinging to him*) Sam, is it ?

SAM : There's been an accident. Go away, Rose.

[*He tries to force her away.*

ROSE : Tell me what's happened ! Tell me !

MISS CUSHING (*appearing at the window*) : They're bringing her down !

ROSE (*with a cry*) : It *is* my mother !

MISS CUSHING (*seeing her*) : Oh, my God, there's Rose !

[MRS. FIORENTINO, MRS. JONES, MRS. HILDEBRAND, LIPPO, *and* BUCHANAN *crowd to the Maurrant windows.*

SAM : Rose ! Go away !

[*She pays no attention to him, but stands watching the door, transfixed. The* INTERNE *comes briskly out of the house.*

THE INTERNE (*to the* MARSHAL) : Hold the door open, will you ?

[*He comes down the steps.*

THE MARSHAL : Sure, doc !

[*He hurries into the vestibule.*

THE INTERNE (*to the crowd*) : Keep back, now !

ROSE (*seizing the* INTERNE'S *arm*) : Doctor ! Is she dead ?

THE INTERNE : Who are you ? Her daughter ?

ROSE : Yes, sir. I'm her daughter.

THE INTERNE : She's pretty badly hurt. Step aside, now !

[*They step aside, as the* AMBULANCE DRIVER *and the* POLICEMAN *come out of the house, carrying* MRS. MAURRANT *on the stretcher. There is a low murmur from the crowd.*

THE AMBULANCE DRIVER : Easy, now.

THE POLICEMAN : All right.

[*They come down the steps and go towards the left.*

ROSE (*running forward and gripping the side of the stretcher*) Mother ! Mother !

MRS. MAURRANT (*opening her eyes feebly*) : Rose !

[*She tries to lift her hand, but it falls back.*

THE INTERNE (*pulling* ROSE *back*) : You mustn't talk to her, now.

[SAM *takes her about the shoulders. They and the* INTERNE *follow the stretcher off at the left.*

The crowd swarms after them. FRED *comes out of the house, carrying one end of an iron bedstead.*

CURTAIN

Mid-afternoon of the same day. At the left of the stoop is a large roll of bedding. Before the rise of the curtain, and continuing faintly thereafter, a woman can be heard singing scales. OLSEN, *pipe in mouth, is leaning against the railing. Two* MEN, *furniture-movers, appear at the left.*

ONE OF THE MEN (*picking up the bedding*) : All right. Dat's all, Charlie !

[*The* MEN *exit left.*

A POLICEMAN *comes out of the house, carrying the blood-stained dress of* MRS. MAURRANT, *and* SANKEY'S *coat, cap, and bill-holder. He comes down the steps, and exits at the right.*

At the left, Two Young NURSE-MAIDS, *in smart uniforms, appear, each wheeling a de-luxe baby-carriage.*

FIRST NURSE-MAID (*seeing the house-number*): This must be the place, right here—346

[*They stop, under the* MAURRANT *windows.*

SECOND NURSE-MAID : Yes, I guess it is.

FIRST NURSE-MAID : Yes, this is it, all right. (*Looking up*) Must be right up there, on the first floor, see ?

SECOND NURSE-MAID : Yes, sure. (*Excitedly*) Say, look ! You can see where the glass is out of the window. That's where this feller What's-his-name tried to climb out.

FIRST NURSE-MAID : Oh, yes, I see it ! Say, what do you know about that !

SECOND NURSE-MAID (*taking a pink tabloid newspaper from under the hood of the baby-buggy*) : Wait ! There's a picture of it, somewhere. (*Turning the pages*) Here it is. (*They excitedly examine it together, as she reads*) " Composograph showing Sankey, scantily clad, in a last vain attempt to

escape the vengeance of the jealousy-crazed husband, whose home he had destroyed." And there's Maurrant pulling him back. And Mrs. Maurrant trying to get the pistol away from him, see ? Look at the blood running down her face, will you ?

First Nurse-Maid : It's worse than awful ! Can you *imagine* what those two must have felt like, when he walked in on them like that ?

Second Nurse-Maid: Well, he just happened to be one of the ones that finds out ! Believe me, there's lots and lots of husbands that don't know the half of what goes on up-town, while they're down-town making a living.

First Nurse-Maid : Say, you're not telling me, are you ? If I was to spill all I know, there'd be many a happy home busted up. I wonder if they caught him.

Second Nurse-Maid (*as her* Baby *begins a thin wailing*) : Oh, God, he's in again ! (*To the unseen* Baby) Shut up, a little while, can't you ?

[*She shakes the carriage.*

A Policeman (*appearing at the Maurrant windows, a tabloid in his hand*) : Keep movin', ladies. No loiterin' aroun' here.

First Nurse-Maid (*eagerly*) : Say, have they caught him, yet ?

The Policeman : Why, ain't you hoid ? He was last seen, flyin' over Nova Scotia, on his way to Paris.

First Nurse-Maid : Who are you trying to string, anyhow ?

Second Nurse-Maid (*coquettishly*) : Say, will you let us come up and look around ?

The Policeman : Why, sure, sure ! Bring de babies, too. De commissioner is soivin' tea, up here, at four-thoity.

SECOND NURSE-MAID : You're awful smart, aren't you ?

THE POLICEMAN : Yeah, dat's why dey put me on de entertainment committee. I'm Handsome Harry Moiphy, de boy comedian o' Brooklyn.

FIRST NURSE-MAID (*looking at her watch*) : Oh, say, I ought to be getting back. (*Turning her carriage*) Clarice darling would throw a duck-fit, if she knew I brought her precious Dumplings to a neighbourhood like this.

SECOND NURSE-MAID (*turning her carriage*) : There's not so much to see, anyhow. It's nothing but a cheap, common dump.

[*They go towards the left.*

THE POLICEMAN : Over de river, goils. See you in de funny paper.

SECOND NURSE-MAID : Don't you get so fresh.

THE POLICEMAN : Drop in again, when you're in de neighbourhood. An' tell Mrs. Vanderbilt Harry was askin' for her.

[*As the* NURSE-MAIDS *go off, at the left,* EASTER *hurries on at the right, several folded newspapers under his arm.*

EASTER (*to the* POLICEMAN, *going to the left of the stoop*) : Is Miss Maurrant up there, officer ?

THE POLICEMAN : No. There ain't nobody up here but me.

EASTER : You don't happen to know where she is, do you ?

THE POLICEMAN : No, I don't. Are you a reporter ?

EASTER : Who, me ? I'm just a friend of hers. I've got to see her.

THE POLICEMAN : Well, I ain't seen her since she went off to the horspital this mornin'. She ain't been back since.

[*He starts to leave the window.*

EASTER : Oh, officer !

THE POLICEMAN : Yeah ?

EASTER : Have they caught him, yet ?

THE POLICEMAN : Naw, not yet. But we'll get 'im, all right !

[*He leaves the window.* EASTER *remains at the left of the stoop, uncertain whether to go or not.* MRS. JONES *appears, at the right, carrying several newspapers.*

MRS. JONES (*to* OLSEN) : Have they caught him yet ?

OLSEN (*shaking his head*) : No.

MRS. JONES : I been down at Police Headquarters, all this while—— (*Breaking off, as she notices* EASTER) Say, what's he want here ?

[OLSEN *shrugs his shoulders.*

EASTER (*approaching them*) : Pardon me, but maybe you can tell me where I can find Miss Maurrant ?

[OLSEN *shakes his head.*

MRS. JONES : Why no, I can't. I jus' this minute got back from Police Headquarters. Maybe she's aroun' at the horspital.

EASTER : No, I just came from there.

MRS. JONES : Well, I really couldn't say where she is. Was there somethin' special you wanted to see her about ?

EASTER : I'm a friend of hers——

MRS. JONES : Yeah, I noticed you talkin' to her, last night, when I took the dog out. (*Staring at him*) Well, I guess she'll need all the friends she's got, now. Imagine a thing like that happenin' right here in this house, at ten o'clock in the mornin' ! Everythin' goin' on just as usual, and then, all of a sudden, before you know it, there's two people murdered.

OLSEN : I tal everybody some day he kill her.

MRS. JONES : Well, I ain't sayin' it's right to kill anybody, but if anybody had a reason, he certainly had. You oughta heard some o' the questions they was askin' me down at the Police. I could feel myself gettin' redder an' redder. " Say," I says, " how do you expect me to know things like that ? " (*Suddenly, as she looks left*) Here's Rose now !

EASTER : Where ?

[*He turns quickly and hurries to the left, as* ROSE *appears, carrying four or five packages.*

MRS. JONES (*to* OLSEN) : He seems to take a pretty friendly interest in her.

[OLSEN *nods.*

ROSE (*anxiously, as she comes up to* EASTER, *at the left of the stoop*) : Have they caught him yet ?

EASTER : Why no, they haven't. I just asked the officer, upstairs.

ROSE : Oh, I hope he got away ! If they get him, there's no telling what they'll do to him. And what would be the good of that ? He never would have done it, if he'd been in his right mind.

EASTER : I only heard about it, a little while ago. So I went right around to the hospital. But they said you'd left.

ROSE (*going to the steps*) : She never opened her eyes again. They did everything they could for her, but it didn't help.

EASTER : Here, let me take your bundles.

ROSE : No, it's all right. I think I'll just sit down for a minute.

[*She sits on the stoop and puts the packages beside her.*

EASTER : Can't I get you something ? A drink or something ?

ROSE : No, I'm all right. It's so hot. (*She puts her hand to her head.*) And all those people asking me a lot of questions.

MRS. JONES (*approaching the stoop*) : Are you feelin' dizzy or anythin' ?

ROSE : No, I'll be all right in a minute.

MRS. JONES : Well, I was gonna say, if you want to go up to my flat an' lay down for a minute——

ROSE : No, thanks ; I don't want to lie down. I've got to go upstairs to get some things.

EASTER : Why, say, you don't want to go up there !

ROSE : I've got to ; there's some things I need.

EASTER : Well, let me get them for you. Or this lady here.

MRS. JONES : Yeah, sure. The place is a sight, up there. You're li'ble to go into a faint or somethin'.

ROSE : I guess nothing can be any worse than what's happened already. (*Indicating the bundles*) I got to change my dress. I bought a white dress for her. And white silk stockings. I want her to look pretty.

MRS. JONES : Yeah, white is the nicest.

ROSE : She looks so quiet and natural. You'd think she was asleep.

MRS. JONES : It was the same way with my mother. You'd of thought she was gonna get up, the next minute. (*Starting to go up the steps*) Well, I gotta go up an' get me some lunch. Between everythin' happenin' an' goin' down to Police Headquarters an' all, I ain't had a bite to eat since breakfast. (*Stopping on the top step, and looking from* ROSE *to* EASTER) Well, you certainly never know, when you get up in the mornin', what the day is gonna bring.

[*She enters the house.*

ROSE (*rising*) : Well, I'd better be going up, too. There's a lot of things to attend to.

EASTER : You better let me come up with you.

ROSE : Why thanks, Mr. Easter. But I'd rather go alone, if you don't mind.

EASTER : But, listen here—you can't go through all this alone—a kid like you. That's why I came around. I knew you'd be needing a helping hand.

ROSE : That's awfully nice of you, Mr. Easter. But I don't need any help, honest I don't.

[*She opens one of the packages.*

EASTER : Why, you can't handle everything yourself ! What about a place to live and all that ?

ROSE (*taking a rosette of black crape out of the package*) : Well, I don't exactly know, yet. I'll have to find some place where Willie and I can live. I'd like it to be some place where he wouldn't be running around the streets all the time. You see, there's nobody but me to look out for him, now.

[OLSEN *crosses to the cellar.* MRS. JONES *appears at her window and furtively peeps out, at* ROSE *and* EASTER.

ROSE (*as she sees that* OLSEN *is about to descend the cellar steps*) : Oh, Mr. Olsen !

OLSEN (*stopping*) : Yes ma'am.

ROSE : Would you mind lending me a hammer and some tacks ? I want to put up this crape.

OLSEN : Yes ma'am ; I bring 'em right away.

[*He goes down into the cellar.* MRS. JONES *leaves the window.*

EASTER (*insistently*) : But why won't you let me help you out ?

ROSE : It's terribly nice of you, Mr. Easter. But

I'll be able to manage alone, really I will. It isn't as if I wasn't young and strong and able to take care of myself. But as it is, I'd sort of rather not be under obligations.

EASTER : Why, you wouldn't be under any obligations. I just mean it in a friendly way, that's all.

ROSE : You've been very nice to me and all that, Mr. Easter. But—well, I've been sort of thinking things over—you know, about what we talked about last night and all. And I honestly don't think I'd care about going on the stage.

EASTER : Say, you've got me all wrong, Rose ! Just forget all about that, will you ? I just want to help you out, that's all. (*Taking a step towards her*) I think you're one swell kid, and I want to do something for you. I'm not trying to put anything over on you.

[SHIRLEY *appears at the left, carrying her school-bag, from which a newspaper protrudes.*

ROSE : Well, that's nice and friendly of you, Mr. Easter. And if I ever do need any help——

SHIRLEY (*catching sight of* ROSE) : Rose ! You poor thing ! (*She runs up to* ROSE *and throws her arms about her.*) It's terrible—terrible !

ROSE : Yes, it is. But I sort of had a feeling, all along, that something terrible was going to happen.

[OLSEN *comes up the steps with a hammer and a box of tacks.*

SHIRLEY : How could he do such a thing ! I couldn't believe it when I read it.

ROSE : He was out of his mind, when he did it. Oh, I only hope he got away ! (*As* OLSEN *approaches*) Oh, thanks, Mr. Olsen.

OLSEN : I do it.

ROSE (*giving him the crape*) : Oh, would you, please ? Right up there, I think.

[*She indicates the left of the doorway.*

OLSEN (*going up the steps*) : Sure.

ROSE (*going to* EASTER *and extending her hand*) : Thanks for coming around, Mr. Easter. I don't know when I'll be able to get back to the office.

EASTER : Why, that's all right about that. Only, in the meantime, I wish——

ROSE : If I need any help, I'll let you know. (*With a tone of finality in her voice*) Good-bye.

EASTER : All right ; but don't forget. (*He hesitates, then decides to go.*) Well, good-bye.

[*He goes off at left.*

ROSE : I've got to go up and get some things that Willie and I need. Sam went to call for him at school and take him around to my aunt's. You see, I didn't want him coming back here. He's only a little kid, after all.

SHIRLEY : Oh, it's such a terrible thing ! I can't believe it yet.

OLSEN (*holding up the crape*) : Dis vay ?

ROSE : Yes, like that. (*Hesitantly, as she picks up her bundles*) Miss Kaplan, it's sort of silly of me, I guess. But I'm kind of afraid to go up there alone. I wonder if you'd mind coming up with me.

[OLSEN *tacks up the crape.*

SHIRLEY : Anything I can do for you, poor child !

[*She and* ROSE *go up the steps.*

ROSE : Thanks ever so much. (*To* OLSEN) Thanks, Mr. Olsen. It's awfully nice of you.

[*She and* SHIRLEY *enter the house.* OLSEN *exits down the cellar steps.* KAPLAN *appears at his window, and seating himself, begins to read a newspaper. An under-sized* MAN *and a tall, athletic* WOMAN *appear at the right. They are dressed for tennis, and carry tennis rackets.*

A MAN (*as they cross*) : He *would* say that.

A WOMAN : So I just looked at him for a moment, without saying anything. And then, I said : " My dear boy," I said. " What do you expect anyhow, in this day and age ? " I said, " Why even Frankl has to do a black bathroom, occasionally," I said.

A MAN (*as they disappear at the left*) : Exactly ! And what did he say to that ?

[BUCHANAN *comes out of the house and, seeing* KAPLAN *at the window, stops at the right balustrade.*

BUCHANAN : Well, there's been *some* excitement around here, to-day.

KAPLAN (*looking up from his paper*) : Dees is a terrible t'ing vich hes heppened.

BUCHANAN : I'll say it is ! You know, the way I look at it, he didn't have a right to kill the both of them like that. Of course I'm not saying what she did was right, either.

KAPLAN : How ken ve call ourselves ciwilised, ven ve see thet sax jealousy hes de power to avaken in us de primitive pessions of de sevege ?

BUCHANAN (*rather bewildered by this*) : Yes, that's true, too. Of course, you can't expect a man to stand by and see his home broken up. But murdering them, like that, is going a little too far. Well, I got to go and phone the doctor. This thing's given my wife a kind of a *re*lapse. She thought a lot of Mrs. Maurrant.

[*He goes down the steps, and off at the left, as* LIPPO *appears at the right.*

LIPPO (*stopping in front of* KAPLAN'S *window*) : Dey don' ketcha Maurrant, ha ?

KAPLAN : I hevn't hoid anyt'ing foider.

LIPPO : He'sa gonna get da 'lectrica-chair, ha ?

KAPLAN : De blood-lust of our enlightened population must be setisfied ! De Chreestian

state will kerry out to de last letter de Mosaic law.

LIPPO : Eef Ahm ketcha my wife sleepin' wit' 'nudder man, Ahm gonna keela 'er, too.

[SAM *hurries on at the left.*

KAPLAN : So you t'ink thet merriage should give to de hosband de power of life and det' and thet——

SAM (*going up the steps*) : Papa, is there any news of Maurrant ?

KAPLAN : I hev heard notting.

SAM : The police are going to make me testify against him. What can I do, papa ?

KAPLAN : You ken do notting.

SAM : How can I send a man to the electric-chair ? How can I ? I tried to stop him, papa. I tried to warn her——

[*He stops short, as several shots are heard off-stage, at the left.*) What's that ?

LIPPO (*excitedly*) : Dey finda 'im !

[*He runs off at the left, followed by* SAM. KAPLAN *leans out of the window. At the same moment,* MRS. JONES *leans out of her window and, a moment later,* MRS. FIORENTINO *out of hers. In the Maurrant apartment, the* POLICEMAN *leans out and* ROSE *and* SHIRLEY *appear in the hall bedroom window.* ROSE *is wearing a mourning-dress.* OLSEN *comes up the cellar steps and runs off at the left.* MRS. OLSEN *comes up the steps. Several men and women appear at the right, and run off at the left.*

ROSE (*agitatedly*) : Is that him ?

THE POLICEMAN : Must be !

[*Voices are heard shouting in the distance, and then another shot. The* POLICEMAN *leaves the window.*

ROSE : Oh, God ! They wouldn't shoot him, would they ?

[*She leaves the window.*

SHIRLEY (*following her*) : Rose !

[*Two or three more persons appear at the right, and run off at the left. The* POLICEMAN *runs out of the house, as* BUCHANAN *appears at the left.*

BUCHANAN (*excitedly*) : They got him !

[*The* POLICEMAN *runs off at the left.* SHIRLEY *reappears at the Maurrant window.*

MRS. JONES (*calling*) : Have they got him ?

BUCHANAN : Yes ! He was hiding in the furnace, down at 322. (*As* ROSE *comes out of the house*) : They found him, Miss Maurrant !

ROSE (*her hand to her heart*) : Oh ! Is he hurt ?

BUCHANAN : I don't know. He fired at the cops and they fired back at him. I was just passing the house, when it happened.

MRS. JONES (*leaning far out*) : Here they come !

[*She leaves the window.*

The low murmur of the approaching crowd can be heard off stage, left.

ROSE : Where ? (*She comes down the stoop and looks off at the left.*) Oh ! (*She covers her eyes and turns away.*)

MRS. FIORENTINO : You better come inside.

SHIRLEY : Come up, Rose.

BUCHANAN : Yes, you better.

[*He takes her by the arm.*

ROSE (*resisting*) : No. No. Please let me alone. I want to see him.

[*She leans against the railing. Meanwhile, the murmur and tramp of the approaching crowd has grown nearer and nearer.*)

MRS. FIORENTINO : Look at him, vill you !

[MISS CUSHING *comes out of the house, and stands on the stoop, followed a moment later, by* MRS. JONES. MAURRANT *appears at the left, between two policemen. Behind him a third policeman holds back a*

swarming crowd, which includes SAM *and* LIPPO. MAURRANT'S *clothes are torn, and his right arm is in a crude sling. Sweat, blood and grime have made him almost unrecognisable. The policemen, too, show evidences of a struggle.*

ROSE (*running forward*) : Pop ! Are you hurt ?

MAURRANT (*seeing her for the first time*) : Rose !

ONE OF THE POLICEMEN (*to whom* MAURRANT *is manacled*) : Keep back, miss !

MAURRANT : It's me daughter ! Fer Chris' sake, boys, lemme talk to me daughter ! Maybe I'll never be seein' her again !

FIRST POLICEMAN : Give 'im a woid wit' her.

[*He is the* OFFICER *who was on duty in the Maurrant apartment.*

SECOND POLICEMAN (*after a moment's hesitation*) : Well, all right. (*Savagely to* MAURRANT) : But don't try to pull nothin', hear ?

[*There is a forward movement in the crowd.*

FIRST POLICEMAN (*to the crowd*) : Keep back, youse !

MAURRANT : Rose ! You're wearin' a black dress, Rose !

ROSE : Oh, pop, why did you do it ? Why did you ?

MAURRANT : I must o' been out o' me head, Rose. Did she say anythin' ?

ROSE : She never opened her eyes again.

MAURRANT : I'd been drinkin', Rose—see what I mean ?—an' all the talk that was goin' around. I just went clean off me nut, that's all.

ROSE : What'll they do to you, pop ?

MAURRANT : It's the chair for me, I guess. But I don't care—let 'em give me the chair. I deserve it all right. But it's her, I'm thinkin' of, Rose—the way she looked at me. I oughtn't to done it, Rose.

ROSE : She was always so good and sweet.

MAURRANT : Don't I know it? I ain't no murderer—you ought to be the one to know that, Rose. I just went out o' me head, that's all it was.

SECOND POLICEMAN : All right, that's all now. Come on !

MAURRANT : Gimme a minute, can't you? She's me daughter. Gimme a chance, can't you? What's gonna happen to you, Rose?

ROSE : I'll be all right, pop. You don't need to worry about me.

MAURRANT : I ain't been a very good father, have I?

ROSE : Don't worry about that, pop.

MAURRANT : It ain't that I ain't meant to be. It's just the way things happened to turn out, that's all. Keep your eye on Willie, Rose. Don't let Willie grow up to be a murderer, like his pop.

ROSE : I'm going to do all I can for him, pop.

MAURRANT : You're a good girl, Rose. You was always a good girl.

ROSE (*breaking down*) : Oh, pop !

[*She throws her arms about his neck and buries her head against him.* MAURRANT *sobs hoarsely.*

FIRST POLICEMAN (*gently*) : Come on, now, miss.

[*He and* SAM *take* ROSE *away from* MAURRANT.

SECOND POLICEMAN : All right. Come on, Charlie.

[*They go towards the right, the crowd swarming behind them. Straggling along at the very end of the crowd, is an unkempt woman, wheeling a ramshackle baby-carriage.* MRS. JONES *and* MISS CUSHING *fall in with the crowd.* ROSE *gradually recovers her self-control, and stands at the stoop, with* SAM *beside her. The others watch the receding crowd for a*

moment. Then KAPLAN *and* MRS. FIORENTINO *leave their windows. The* FIRST POLICEMAN *enters the house, followed by* LIPPO. MRS. OLSEN *goes to the cellar.* SHIRLEY *looks down at* ROSE *and* SAM, *for a moment, then abruptly leaves the window.*

SAM (*taking* ROSE *by the arm*) : Rose, you better come inside.

ROSE : No, I'm all right again, Sam—honestly I am. (*Trying to regain her self-composure*) : What about Willie, Sam ?

SAM : I told him an accident had happened.

ROSE : It's better to break it to him, that way. But I'll have to tell him, I guess. He'd only find it out himself, to-morrow, with the papers all full of it. I saw Mrs. Sankey, down at Police Headquarters. It's terrible for her, with two little children.

SHIRLEY (*appearing at the Maurrant window, a covered pot in her hand*) : Rose !

ROSE (*looking up*) : Yes, Miss Kaplan ?

SHIRLEY : There's a chicken here, that I found on the gas-stove.

ROSE : A chicken ?

SHIRLEY : Yes. The policeman says he smelt it cooking, this morning, so he turned out the gas.

ROSE : Oh, I remember, now. My mother said she was going to make some soup for poor Mrs. Buchanan, upstairs.

SHIRLEY : It won't keep long, in this weather.

ROSE : No. I really think Mrs. Buchanan ought to have the good of it.

SHIRLEY : All right. I'll take it up to her.

ROSE : Thanks ever so much, Miss Kaplan. (SHIRLEY *leaves the window.*) It's only a few hours ago that she was standing right here, telling me about the chicken. And then, she went upstairs, and the next I saw of her, they were carrying

her out. (*Abruptly, as she starts to go up the steps*) Well, I've got to go up and get my things.

SAM : I must talk to you ! What are you going to do, Rose ?

ROSE : Well, I haven't really had any time to do much thinking. But I really think the best thing I could do, would be to get out of New York. You know, like we were saying, this morning—how things might be different, if you only had a chance to breathe and spread out a little. Only when I said it, I never dreamt it would be this way.

SAM : If you go, I'll go with you.

ROSE : But, Sam dear——

SAM : I don't care anything about my career. It's you—you—I care about. Do you think I can stay here, stifling to death, in this slum, and never seeing you ? Do you think my life means anything to me, without you ?

ROSE : But, Sam, we've got to be practical about it. How would we manage ?

SAM : I don't care what I do. I'll be a day-labourer ; I'll dig sewers—anything. (*Taking her passionately in his arms*) Rose, don't leave me !

ROSE : I like you so much, Sam. I like you better than anybody I know.

SAM : I love you, Rose. Let me go with you !

ROSE : It would be so nice to be with you. You're different from anybody I know. But I'm just wondering how it would work out.

SAM : If we have each other, that's the vital thing, isn't it ? What else matters but that ?

ROSE : Lots of things, Sam. There's lots of things to be considered. Suppose something was to happen—well, suppose I was to have a baby, say. That sometimes happens, even when you don't want it to. What would we do, then ? We'd be tied down then, for life, just like all the

other people around here. They all start out loving each other and thinking that everything is going to be fine—and before you know it, they find out they haven't got anything and they wish they could do it all over again—only it's too late.

SAM : It's to escape all that, that we must be together. It's only because we love each other and belong to each other, that we can find the strength to escape.

ROSE (*shaking her head*) : No, Sam.

SAM : Why do you say no ?

ROSE : It's what you said just now—about people belonging to each other. I don't think people ought to belong to anybody but themselves. I was thinking, that if my mother had really belonged to herself, and that if my father had really belonged to himself, it never would have happened. It was only because they were always depending on somebody else, for what they ought to have had inside themselves. Do you see what I mean, Sam ? That's why I don't want to belong to anybody, and why I don't want anybody to belong to me.

SAM : You want to go through life alone ?—never loving anyone, never having anyone love you ?

ROSE : Why, of course not, Sam ! I want love more than anything else in the world. But loving and belonging aren't the same thing. (*Putting her arms about him*) Sam dear, listen. If we say good-bye, now, it doesn't mean that it has to be for ever. Maybe some day, when we're older and wiser, things will be different. Don't look as if it was the end of the world, Sam !

SAM : It *is* the end of my world.

ROSE : It isn't, Sam ! If you'd only believe in yourself, a little more, things wouldn't look nearly as bad. Because once you're sure of

yourself, the things that happen to you, aren't so important. The way I look at it, it's not what you do that matters so much ; it's what you are. (*Warmly*) I'm so fond of you, Sam. And I've got such a lot of confidence in you. (*Impulsively*) Give me a nice kiss.

[SAM *takes her in his arms and kisses her, passionately. A gawky* GIRL *of seventeen—one of Lippo's pupils, appears at the left, and looks at them, scandalised. Then she goes into the vestibule and rings the bell. The door clicks and she enters the house, as* SHIRLEY *comes out, carrying a wicker suitcase.* SHIRLEY *looks at* SAM *and* ROSE.

ROSE (*to* SHIRLEY) : I was just telling Sam, that I think I'll soon be going away from New York.

[SAM *looks at her, for a moment, in agony, then goes abruptly into the house.*

SHIRLEY : I put your things in this suitcase.

[*She comes down to the pavement. The* GIRL, *in the Fiorentino apartment, begins tuning her violin.*

ROSE (*taking the suitcase*) : You've been awfully nice to me. Don't worry about Sam, Miss Kaplan. Everything will be all right with him.

SHIRLEY : I hope so.

[*From the* FIORENTINO *apartment come the strains of Dvořák's Humoresque, jerkily played on a violin.*

ROSE : Oh, I just know it will ! (*Extending her hand*) Good-bye, Miss Kaplan.

SHIRLEY : Good-bye, Rose. (*Impulsively*) You're a sweet girl ! (*She hugs and kisses her.*)

ROSE : I hope I'll see you again.

SHIRLEY (*crying*) : I hope so, Rose.

[ROSE *takes up the suitcase and goes off at the left.* SHIRLEY *stands watching her.*

KAPLAN (*re-appearing at his window*) : Shoiley, vot's de metter again vit Sem ? He's crying on de bed.

SHIRLEY : Let him alone, papa, can't you ?

[*She turns and enters the house.* KAPLAN *sighs and seating himself at the window, opens a newspaper.*

[*A shabby, middle-aged* COUPLE *appear at the right, and approach the stoop.*

THE MAN (*reading the To Let sign*) : Here's a place. Six rooms. Want to take a look at it ?

[A GROUP OF CHILDREN *off stage left, begin singing "The Farmer in the Dell." This continues until after the curtain is down.*

THE WOMAN : All right. No harm lookin'. Ring for the janitor. (*The* MAN *goes up the stoop and rings the janitor's bell.*) Somebody must o' just died.

THE MAN : Yeah, maybe that's why they're movin' out. (*Wiping his face with a handkerchief*) Phoo ! Seems to be gettin' hotter every minute.

[MRS. FIORENTINO *seats herself at her window, a sewing-basket in her lap.* MRS. JONES *and* MISS CUSHING *appear at the right, busily engaged in conversation.*

MISS CUSHING : The poor little thing !

MRS. JONES (*as they go up the steps*) : Well, you never can tell with them quiet ones. It wouldn't surprise me a bit, if she turned out the same way as her mother. She's got a gentleman friend, that I guess ain't hangin' around for nothin'. I seen him, late last night, and this afternoon, when I come home from the police——

[*She is still talking, as they enter the house.*

[MRS. OLSEN *comes up the cellar steps.* A SAILOR *appears at the left, with two girls, an arm about the waist of each. They stroll slowly across.*

The curtain falls.

THE END

BADGER S GREEN

CHARACTERS

DOCTOR WETHERBY MAJOR FORRESTER MR. TWIGG	Gentlemen of importance in the village
MR. BUTLER	A speculative builder
MR. ROGERS	Landlord of the Blue Boar
DICKIE WETHERBY	The Doctor's son
MRS. WETHERBY	The Doctor's wife
MRS. FORRESTER	The Major's wife
MR. BUTLER'S SECRETARY	
MARY	Maid at the Doctor's house

A FEW VILLAGERS

R. C. Sherriff

BADGER'S GREEN

A Play
in Three Acts

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THE SCENE

A small Hampshire village on three late summer days

ACT I

SCENE : Dr. Wetherby's Library : Monday afternoon

ACT II

SCENE I : The same : Tuesday afternoon

SCENE II : The same : Wednesday afternoon

ACT III

SCENE I : A Marquee on the Green : Wednesday midday

SCENE II : The Marquee : Wednesday afternoon

First presented at the PRINCE OF WALES THEATRE *by* MAURICE BROWNE, JUNE 12th, 1930, *with the following cast:*

DOCTOR WETHERBY	HORACE HODGES
MAJOR FORRESTER	LOUIS GOODRICH
MR. TWIGG	J. SEBASTIAN SMITH
MR. BUTLER	FELIX AYLMER
MR. ROGERS	FREDERICK BURTWELL
DICKIE	ROBERT DOUGLAS
MRS. WETHERBY	MARGARET SCUDAMORE
MRS. FORRESTER	HILDA SIMS
MR. BUTLER'S SECRETARY	MAISIE DARRELL
MARY	KATHLEEN HARRISON

PRODUCED BY JAMES WHALE

ACT I

The library of DR. WETHERBY'S *house, a low-built peaceful room, overlooking the village green.*

Through open windows, beyond a rather wild, entangled little garden and a tall iron gate, you can see the green turf of the cricket pitch baking in the sun. It must be scorching hot out there, but the room is cool and twilit, because big elms shade it, and ivy encroaches greedily round its windows.

DR. WETHERBY *is standing in front of a cricket pad which is propped up on a chair. He is a plump, white-haired man who might be pompous if he were not so quiet and kind. He holds a saucer of liquid pipeclay in one hand ; in the other, a toothbrush with which he is applying the mixture to the pad. Newspapers are stretched out on the floor to protect the carpet.*

He stands back a pace to view his work in perspective, his head a little to one side ; he returns to his work with a concentration that causes heavy, rhythmic breathing.

There is a tap on the door. A MAID *comes in.*

MAID : Mr. Twigg's here, sir.

[*The* DOCTOR *continues to work in silence.*

Shall I ask him in, sir ?

DOCTOR (*pausing, and looking over his shoulder*) : Who ?

MAID : Mr. Twigg, sir.

DOCTOR : Good heavens ! (*He consults his watch.*) Surely it's not three yet ?

MAID : It's quite that, sir.

DOCTOR (*with a sigh*) : Very well then, Mary. Ask him in.

[MARY *leaves the room.*

[*The* DOCTOR *returns to his pad. Soon* MR. TWIGG *is shown in. He is rather a shy little man, with something of the air of the City about him. He is untidy, but very clean. His grey suit is old-fashioned and rather loose in cut. His panama hat has mellowed to the colour of ripe corn. There is a large flat book under his arm. He advances in a business-like way, and drops the book smartly on the table.*

MR. TWIGG (*breezily*) : Well, here we are !

DOCTOR (*glancing over his shoulder without enthusiasm*) : Ah ! (*He returns to his pad.*)

[*There is silence for a while. Finally the* DOCTOR *speaks without turning round.*

DOCTOR : You don't mind me just finishing this pad, do you ?

MR. TWIGG : No ! Carry on, please.

DOCTOR : You know what it is if you stop.

MR. TWIGG : I know. You don't get the same effect at all.

DOCTOR : You get an uneven surface.

MR. TWIGG : It really means doing it all over again. It's exactly the same when I'm varnishing anything. You must do the whole job, as it were, in one breath. For instance, the other day I was just finishing a pipe-rack ; I'd just got to the most tricky part of it—the holes for the stems—and what do you think ? my housekeeper comes to say dinner's ready ! Now supposing I'd just put the brush down and left it——

[MR. TWIGG *is about to continue, but the* DOCTOR *turns and breaks in very kindly.*

DOCTOR : Yes—I say—I *wonder* if you'd mind not talking just for a minute.

MR. TWIGG : I'm sorry——

[MR. TWIGG *fusses with his book, opens it flat and glances at the pages. He takes a small pencil*

from his waistcoat pocket, goes to the windows, and sharpens it just outside. The DOCTOR *gives one last careful touch with the toothbrush and steps away.*

DOCTOR : There we are !

[MR. TWIGG *comes and stands beside him.*

MR. TWIGG : What a lovely surface you do get !

DOCTOR : It just wants care, that's all.

[*He puts the saucer of pipeclay on a chair, takes the pad to the window and leans it outside in the sun to dry.*

DOCTOR (*looking round outside*) : No sign of the Major yet.

MR. TWIGG : I saw him as I came by. He was busy with his pigeons. He was just going up to have a wash. He said he'd come right along.

[*The* DOCTOR *returns briskly into the room.*

DOCTOR : Have you fixed up about the marquee for Wednesday ?

MR. TWIGG : Yes. It's coming this afternoon. Ought to be here any time now. They wanted to send us an awful black and yellow striped thing. I said " white."

DOCTOR : Good heavens, yes ! Whoever heard of a black and yellow marquee for a cricket match ? What do they think it's for—a school treat ?

MR. TWIGG : I don't know. Those sort of people don't seem to have any idea.

DOCTOR : Anyhow, I hope you spoke to them pretty sharply about the one they sent last year ?

MR. TWIGG : Yes, I was a bit sarcastic. I said it was usual to have a white tent for a cricket match—not a circus tent.

DOCTOR : Good ! I'm glad you let them have it.

MR. TWIGG : You've got to—at times.

[*There is a pause. The* Doctor *is restless.*

Doctor : I wish the Major would buck up. It's nearly ten past three.

Mr. Twigg : He'd only got to wash his hands and put his coat on. (*He goes to the window and looks round.*) Isn't that him, over there, talking to Hobson ?

Doctor (*beside* Mr. Twigg) : Yes.

[*There is a pause. They turn into the room. The* Doctor *speaks rather gravely.*

Doctor : Look here, Mr. Twigg—before the Major comes—do you know whether this trouble's leaked out ?

Mr. Twigg : I haven't heard anything.

Doctor : Nor have I—but naturally I *wouldn't* hear.

Mr. Twigg : Quite.

Doctor : I wondered whether anything had come to your ears. I've a sort of feeling the Major's been talking.

Mr. Twigg : Well, I only know I came round the corner by Turner's yesterday—and practically ran into the Major. He was talking very confidentially to the Vicar.

Doctor : Yes ?

Mr. Twigg : Well, he stopped when he saw me. I felt he was embarrassed.

Doctor : What happened then ?

Mr. Twigg : Well, I just smiled and walked by ; but there was no mistaking a sense of—of restraint.

Doctor : What—er—did you feel about the Vicar ?

Mr. Twigg : Well, he was just listening, and—and scraping the ground with his stick.

DOCTOR (*quietly*) : Yes.

[*There is silence for a moment. The* DOCTOR *is deep in thought. Suddenly he turns on* MR. TWIGG *and speaks with emphasis.*

DOCTOR : I'm certain the Major's talking—all over the village. It's beastly—so undignified. Now look here, Mr. Twigg, I'm quite determined about this. I'm not going to be insulted. I'm not going to have any nonsense from the Major.

MR. TWIGG : Quite.

DOCTOR : I've given way time and again, just simply because—well, I do *hate* nastiness. But the Major thinks it's weakness—he thinks I'm afraid of him. I've given way for the sake of the village—for the sake of harmony. But you see how it's undermining my prestige ?

MR. TWIGG : I do !

DOCTOR : Well, the time's come to stand firm. I depend on you to back me up.

MR. TWIGG : Certainly !

DOCTOR : When it comes to my wife being insulted before the whole village, it's time to act. You'll find I can be as firm as a rock.

MR. TWIGG : I think you ought to be. I mean, there's no doubt people are beginning to—to *notice* things.

DOCTOR : In what way do you mean ?

MR. TWIGG : Well, it's difficult to—to explain, exactly.

DOCTOR : What's the general *feeling* about the Major ?

MR. TWIGG : Well, of course, there's no doubt people realise what a lot he does.

DOCTOR : Do *you* think he does a lot ?

MR. TWIGG : Well—no. Not as much as *he* does.

DOCTOR : Don't people realise the kind of man he is ?

MR. TWIGG : I don't think so. He's got that cheery way with the younger men.

DOCTOR : So the younger men support him ?

MR. TWIGG : They feel he does a lot for them.

DOCTOR : *I* do nothing for them, then ?

MR. TWIGG : Of course you do. But you know what young men are. You help in a quiet way. The Major's on the surface all the time—if you know what I mean.

DOCTOR (*quietly*) : I know what you mean.

MR. TWIGG : Take the Club, for instance. The Major's always down there playing billiards with them, and standing them beer. He's always telling them he presented the new billiard balls, but he never mentions that you presented the table before most of them were even *born* !

DOCTOR : Or that I raised the money to found the Club.

MR. TWIGG : Did you ?

[*There is a pause. The* DOCTOR *looks sadly at* MR. TWIGG, *then smiles.*

DOCTOR : Did I ? Didn't you—even *you*, Twigg, know that ?

MR. TWIGG (*hastily*) : Well, I never enquired. After all, I've only been here fourteen years—the Club was here when I came.

DOCTOR : And no one ever told you of my struggle to found the Club—my two-year struggle against jealousy and prejudice ? My battle with the Vicar ?

MR. TWIGG : No.

DOCTOR : Does no one enjoy the Club to-day —don't the young men enjoy it ?

MR. TWIGG : Why, of course ! It's *everything* to them—it's the life and soul of the village.

DOCTOR : —and the Major's the life and soul of the Club !

MR. TWIGG : You never let people *know* what you do for them.

DOCTOR : Do you think I'm the sort of man to do that ?

MR. TWIGG : Well, after all, the younger men can hardly expect to know—unless they're told.

DOCTOR : I should have thought perhaps the Major could have told them.

[*There is a pause before the* DOCTOR *speaks again.*

What was the general feeling about the smoking concert incident ?

MR. TWIGG : Well, I think some people thought you were *right* in stopping the Major from having his encore. Others thought you were *wrong*.

DOCTOR : Some people disputed my chairmanship, then ?

MR. TWIGG : Well, they felt the Major always *has* had his encore—as long as they can remember.

DOCTOR : It's the chairman's duty to call for an encore if it is warranted by sufficient public desire. There was *no* public desire.

MR. TWIGG : I know. There never is for the Major ; but he always *does* sing " Dogs of Devon " as an encore, doesn't he ?

DOCTOR : He's sung " Dogs of Devon " for the last time under *my* chairmanship. Had he any right to get up and sing again after I had announced Mr. Hobson's conjuring tricks ?

MR. TWIGG : Certainly not.

DOCTOR : And yet you say people doubted my decision.

[*There is silence.* MR. TWIGG *is distinctly uncomfortable. The* DOCTOR *speaks again very quietly.*

DOCTOR : Supposing, just for a moment, there were to be an open split. Supposing the Major were openly to defy my authority ?

MR. TWIGG : Oh, but that *couldn't* happen !

DOCTOR : I said " supposing " it did. What support would the Major get ?

MR. TWIGG : Well, you can't tell. I think people would sympathise with *you* quite a lot.

DOCTOR (*breathlessly*) : *Sympathise ! Pity*, I suppose !

MR. TWIGG (*hastily*) : No. That's not the word. I mean—well—everybody who knows what you've done would support you.

DOCTOR : And if what I've done has been forgotten ?

[*Silence falls.* MR. TWIGG, *at the table, nervously flicks over the pages of his book. The silence is broken by the* MAJOR, *who comes breezily up the garden path and through the French windows. He is a big, hearty man ; getting on in life, but full of vigour.*

MAJOR : Sorry I'm late. I've had an awful morning. (*He throws his cap on a chair and turns with a heavy sigh.*) It's no good. I must cut things down somehow. Interviews before breakfast to-day——

MR. TWIGG : Before breakfast !

MAJOR : Yes. *Your* work too. You've made the most awful mess over the whist drive. D'you know what you've done ?

MR. TWIGG : No ?

MAJOR : Well, Mrs. Montague came to see me in a terrible state. Did you order the score cards ?

MR. TWIGG : Yes.

MAJOR : Well, look what's come ! (*He flourishes a small card with a pencil hanging from it by coloured thread.*) *Dance* programmes !

MR. TWIGG : But I said " *Whist* " !

MAJOR : Where's the copy of the letter you sent ?

MR. TWIGG : Well, I—I didn't take a copy.

MAJOR : Didn't—take—a copy. (*In despair*) Oh, my God !

MR. TWIGG : Anyhow, why didn't Mrs. Montague come to me ? It's my job.

MAJOR : She said she did, and knocked three times without an answer. Apparently everybody was asleep. Eight o'clock on a summer morning !

MR. TWIGG : Well, I'll write about it.

MAJOR : *Write* about it ! When we want the cards on Wednesday ! (*He pauses, and goes on patiently.*) It's all right. I've sent a telegram.

DOCTOR : It's nearly twenty past three. We must give the General Committee a complete report this evening. There's a lot for us to do yet.

MAJOR (*sitting down briskly at the table*) : Right away, then !

MR. TWIGG : May I propose that Dr. Wetherby takes the chair ?

MAJOR (*carelessly*): I second that.

[*They seat themselves at the table.* DR. WETHERBY *in an armchair on one side, the* MAJOR *opposite him,* MR. TWIGG *in the centre.*

DOCTOR : I suppose we ought to read the Minutes of the last meeting ?

MAJOR : Seems rather red tape, doesn't it—just us three.

DOCTOR : It's hardly a question of what it seems to *us*. The General Committee look to us for an example. I think we ought to.

MAJOR (*laughing indulgently*) : Oh, yes—it doesn't matter.

DOCTOR : I call upon Mr. Twigg to read the Minutes of the last meeting.

[MR. TWIGG *clears his throat and reads.*

MR. TWIGG : " Minutes of Entertainment Sub-Committee of Badger's Green Cricket Club, held at Ivy House, by courtesy of Dr. Wetherby, on Thursday, 3rd August, 1929."

DOCTOR : Are you sure it was the 3rd ? The 3rd was the Friday before Bank Holiday.

MAJOR : Well, we met before Bank Holiday.

DOCTOR : I know, but Thursday was the 2nd. Bank Holiday was on the 5th ; Thursday must have been the 2nd.

MAJOR : It would have been the 1st, if Monday was the 5th—Twigg's wrong.

DOCTOR : Excuse me—I think you're both wrong. Obviously Thursday must have been the 2nd—unless we met on the Friday and not the Thursday. What a pity Twigg's so unreliable.

MAJOR : Twigg's got the *day* all right—we certainly met on the Thursday, because I remember having two other important meetings that evening—it's simply the *date* he's got wrong. Thursday was the 1st.

DOCTOR : Thursday was the 2nd.

MAJOR : I tell you it was the 1st.

DOCTOR (*rising*) : Well, we can soon settle it. (*He crosses to his desk, takes up his calendar, and brings it with quiet triumph to the* MAJOR.) Here you are—Thursday the 2nd. It's a pity you can't trust me a little more, Major.

MAJOR : Let me see.

[*The* DOCTOR *quietly hands him the calendar.*

DOCTOR : There you are.

[*The* MAJOR *studies the calendar with a perplexed face, which slowly lights up in triumph.*

MAJOR : This is a last year's calendar.

DOCTOR : There's no need to be impertinent, Major. Considering I've used it the whole year——

MAJOR : Well, use your eyes. (*He points.*) 1928.

[*The* DOCTOR *looks at the calendar, and silently returns it to his desk.* MR. TWIGG *tactfully begins to read again.*

MR. TWIGG : " Minutes of the Entertainment Sub-Committee of Badger's Green Cricket Club, held at Ivy House, by courtesy of Dr. Wetherby, on Thursday, 3rd August, 1929."

[*The* DOCTOR *has returned to his seat.* MR. TWIGG *continues.*

" Present : Dr. Wetherby in the chair ; Major Forrester ; Mr. Twigg. The Minutes of the previous meeting were read and confirmed. The question of seating accommodation was discussed. It was decided to again approach Mr. Dickenson for the kind loan of his garden seats. Proposed by Dr. Wetherby and seconded by Major Forrester that the secretary write to Mr. Dickenson, thanking him for lending his seats last year, and requesting the loan again. The secretary read a letter from Mrs. Graham, complaining that one of her chairs lent last year was returned with a broken leg——

[MR. TWIGG *continues to read the Minutes concerning the damaged chair.*

[*The* MAJOR, *who has hardly been able to sit still for triumph, begins to chuckle quietly to himself. His chuckle gradually becomes louder. He looks at the* DOCTOR *from beneath his eyebrows. The* DOCTOR *sits with a graven face for a while, pretending not to notice. At last he speaks with quiet dignity.*

DOCTOR : There's an old saying, Major : " Little things please little minds."

MAJOR (*chuckling louder*) : Well, after all, it *was* funny, wasn't it ? Fancy you going about not knowing what year it is !

DOCTOR (*with quiet sarcasm*) : " Little things please little minds."

MAJOR : I did think you could see a joke against yourself !

DOCTOR : I'm always glad to see small minds amused ; it's not easy to provide a simple enough joke.

[*There is silence. The* MAJOR *still smiles to himself.* MR. TWIGG, *who stopped reading the Minutes when the* DOCTOR *spoke, and is now sitting patiently waiting, suddenly becomes aware of the silence, and hurriedly continues to read.*

MR. TWIGG : " The question of the marquee was then raised. Dr. Wetherby complained that the——"

DOCTOR (*breaking in*) : I don't like the word " complained." " Stated " is better.

[MR. TWIGG *makes the alteration with his little pencil, and proceeds.*

MR. TWIGG : " Doctor Wetherby stated that the marquee supplied by Robinsons last year contained a thin red stripe ; he pointed out that

marquees for cricket matches should be a plain white. The secretary was instructed to write to Robinsons, clearly stating that a plain white marquee *must* be provided this year. Following the General Committee's decision to dispense with a hired caterer, and form a voluntary Refreshment Committee of local ladies to arrange the tea, the question of a lady to supervise was raised. No name was put forward, and the matter was left to the next meeting. The meeting then adjourned."

DOCTOR (*after a pause*) : Is it your wish that I sign these Minutes ?

[*The* MAJOR *and* MR. TWIGG *raise their hands. The* DOCTOR *produces a fountain-pen and signs the book. He then turns over the page and consults the Minutes.*

DOCTOR : Points arising. The garden seats ?

MR. TWIGG : Yes. I've seen Mr. Dickenson ; everything's all right. His five seats will take twenty-five. Mrs. Graham will lend her chairs. So, with the benches, we can seat nearly a hundred.

DOCTOR : That's all right, then. Now, the question of the marquee.

MR. TWIGG : Well, as I explained to you, I've arranged all that.

MAJOR : When did you explain it ? I don't remember.

DOCTOR : He was telling me just before you came.

MAJOR : Well, that's hardly official, is it ?

MR. TWIGG (*hurriedly*) : The position is this : Last year there was a great deal of comment about that tent which Robinsons supplied—it had a thin red stripe in it. You remember I was

instructed this year to make it clear that the tent must be a *white* one—just a plain white. I cycled over to Market Duxford and saw Robinsons—in fact I had a personal interview with Mr. Robinson. He wanted to send us a dreadful black and yellow tent, but I was quite firm, and Robinsons promised that we should have a plain white one.

MAJOR : I can't understand why on earth he didn't realise that—surely, a cricket match——

DOCTOR (*breaking in*) : Anyhow, he clearly understands we're not going to accept a black and yellow one ?

MR. TWIGG : Yes, he definitely promised to send a white tent.

DOCTOR : Very well. That's settled. Now then.

[*He peers at the Minute-book.*

MR. TWIGG (*diffidently*) : Well, the next point is —the—er—question of appointing a lady to supervise the tea.

DOCTOR (*sitting back in his chair*) : Yes.

[*There is silence.*

MR. TWIGG : No name was put forward at the last meeting.

[*There is another silence. Presently the* MAJOR *begins to fidget. He starts to speak—stops—clears his throat, and begins again.*

MAJOR : Well, I must say I was rather surprised that no name was suggested at the last meeting. We require a lady with ability to organise. It's—it's very difficult to speak on this matter, and I don't want you to think I am disparaging anyone else, but there's one lady who not only *has* that ability, but also the experience. (*He pauses.*) My wife has organised the choir

teas for the past ten years. During my service days she frequently helped to organise teas on a very large scale. It's naturally embarrassing for a man to propose the name of his own wife, but it seems such an obvious selection—yet here we sat for half an hour at the last meeting and no one——

DOCTOR (*gently breaking in*) : Just a moment, Major. I quite appreciate the loyalty you owe your wife, but you must remember there are certain traditions, and shall I say, courtesies—quite apart from other reasons—that indicate the lady to take charge——

[*He pauses.*

MAJOR : Well, what are you getting at ?

DOCTOR : I don't understand you. I'm " getting at " nothing.

MAJOR : Well, who are you suggesting against my wife ?

DOCTOR : I'm not suggesting anyone "against" your wife, as you put it. You know quite well the lady I mean. My wife is not only the wife of the President of the Club—which in itself clearly indicates her selection—but her own ability places her beyond question as the lady to take charge.

MAJOR : I'm not suggesting a word against your wife—it's simply a question of organising ability.

DOCTOR : On what grounds do you question my wife's organising ability ? You said last week how much you enjoyed our garden party.

MAJOR : Certainly. A delightful party. But tea for ten is a very different matter to tea for fifty.

DOCTOR : It's only a relative matter.

MAJOR : It's a matter of organisation.

DOCTOR : We are not excluding your wife from assisting in the organisation.

MAJOR : That's not the point. The point is that the most experienced organiser must have a free hand.

MR. TWIGG : Can't they *both* do it—jointly ?

DOCTOR (*taking no notice of* MR. TWIGG) : You ignore the value of prestige—the ability to inspire others to work cheerfully in minor capacities.

MAJOR : So my wife has no prestige ? The wife of the captain of the team has no prestige ?

DOCTOR : Don't be silly, Major.

MAJOR : I'm *not* being silly.

DOCTOR (*tapping the table with his pencil*) : Chair, please.

[*There is a pause.*

You ignore the traditions and etiquettes which every village like ours naturally observes.

MAJOR : You put worn-out traditions before efficiency ?

DOCTOR : You still assume, for some extraordinary reason, that your wife is more efficient than mine.

MAJOR : You don't seem to understand. *Experience* is the word I'm stressing——

DOCTOR : —of which you have no proof.

MAJOR : I've got the plainest proof. The choir teas.

[*There is a pause. The* DOCTOR *clears his throat and speaks.*

DOCTOR : I'm sorry, Major Forrester. There are times when, for the good of the village, a man must speak quite frankly. I've attended more than one of the choir teas. I've never said a word

out of fairness for a keen, voluntary effort—but I have detected a certain lack of—of——

MAJOR (*tensely*) : Well, go on——

DOCTOR : —of, shall I say, inability to understand the needs of a large gathering ; an inability to inspire others to work keenly. It's no disparagement to your wife, Major ; a woman either has that ability, or she hasn't.

[*For a moment there is silence: Then the* MAJOR *rises, takes up his hat, and goes without a word to the French windows.*

MR. TWIGG (*in a thin voice*) : Major—where are you going ?

MAJOR (*quietly*) : I am going to place my resignation as captain of the cricket team in the hands of the General Committee——

MR. TWIGG (*in dismay*) : But—but you can't !

MAJOR : In future the Club will do without the services of my gardener to mow the pitch—nor will it have my own poor services.

MR. TWIGG : But it's impossible—the scandal !

MAJOR (*with sudden fury*) : You expect me to sit there and listen to insults flung in my wife's face—behind her back !

MR. TWIGG : But, Major, it's—it's terrible ; the whole Club—the whole village will suffer—do come back !

DOCTOR (*quietly*) : Yes, Major ; sit down for a moment. I have something to say.

MAJOR : I'll stand.

[*There is a pause before the* DOCTOR *speaks.*

DOCTOR : I've been expecting this moment for a long time now. I knew it must come sooner or later. This is no silly, petty quarrel over the ability of two good women. Far deeper issues lie beneath it. For thirty years I've given my all to this village. My medical services, my help on

the cricket field, in the social life. I've never spared myself. For ten years I was captain of the cricket team ; for twenty I have been its President. I hope I may have done some good, and gained some little respect. Ten years ago, Major Forrester, *you* came to live here. I was the first to call upon you. It was *I* who brought you in touch with the best in the village. When your ambitions turned towards the captaincy of the Cricket Club, it was I who brought all my influence towards your election. But of late years I have been conscious of something—a kind of barrier growing up between us. Little incidents, the incident over the wicket-keeping gloves last year, the incident last May at the smoking concert ; little things in themselves, but danger signals all the same ; a studied insolence towards me as President. I am sorry to use those words, Major—studied insolence ; a steady endeavour to undermine my prestige——

MAJOR : Now, look here——

DOCTOR : One moment. I've been forbearing—forbearing to the point of weakness. I sacrificed my pride again and again for the sake of peace. Yet every time I gave way you thought it was weakness ; a fear of *you*. I may be growing an old man, but I still have my spirit. You will not resign, Major—you will have the courage to face a General Meeting. We can no longer tolerate this position—one of us two must go. Mr. Twigg will call a General Meeting. You and I will stand before the village, state our case and be judged. If I am defeated, then you will be President and I will retire. I think I am man enough to bear defeat. I will go away from Badger's Green, even though it means the end of the things that matter to me most of all.

[*There is a pause. The* MAJOR *has been standing by the window. He begins to speak quietly, weighing every word with care, but as he goes on he speaks with increasing warmth.*

MAJOR : I knew this would have to come, too. I've seen it coming nearer day by day. You spoke of giving your all to the village. Haven't I given my all too ? I came here twelve years ago—you said ten just now, but that's a small point—I gave my heart and soul. I founded the Bowling Club. I saved the Archery Club from extinction ; I organised the annual sports on a scale never before dreamed of—and then, at your own request, I turned my energy to the Cricket Club. I became captain. I gave my last ounce of thought and energy to the Club—every spare penny. Yet while the committee showed its gratitude, there was always a nagging opposition (*he points straight at the* DOCTOR) from *you*, Dr. Wetherby ! I would put forward new ideas ; the committee were always keen, but they never dared to act without referring to the President. And what did the President do ? He pulled my ideas to pieces—said " Is it wise ? " He treated me like a hot-headed little boy who must be restrained! Of course the committee listened ! Because you have been here thirty years they follow you like sheep. If by sheer force I was able to make progress and succeed, they passed a vote of thanks, to *you* ! If because of your nagging opposition, I failed—*I* was blamed by *you* !

DOCTOR : That'll do, Major !

MAJOR : There you are ! " That'll do." It's always " That'll do ! " when the plain truth begins to come.

DOCTOR : I've never opposed you. I've merely tried, as an older man, to show you wisdom when I felt you were wrong.

MAJOR : Show me wisdom ! Me ! With twenty years' Army service ! A Major : and you show me wisdom !

DOCTOR : I've said all I have to say, Major.

As President, I decline to accept your resignation from the captaincy, a General Meeting—the whole village—will be asked to judge.

MAJOR : Yes ; because you *know* they'll back you up ! Because you've vegetated here for thirty years, you *know* they daren't turn you out ! Sentiment for an old man !

DOCTOR : How dare you say that ! You are *afraid* to face the village ! Because you bluster and try and bully (*he suddenly becomes quiet*)—I'm sorry—I was forgetting myself. Perhaps I *am* too old. It's the day of the younger men. I won't defend myself. I shall simply explain what has happened—and resign.

MR. TWIGG : Oh—but you can't !

MAJOR : There you are. There's Twigg ! *He* won't accept your resignation—you know the village won't ! Don't you know that *every* village puts sentiment before progress, and goes wallowing on with old men in charge who are too selfish to resign ! That every keen man who tries to drive ahead is suffocated by jealousy ?

DOCTOR : I will not be insulted in my own house ! I order you to leave.

MAJOR (*furiously*) : I will ! Never to return ! I shall leave the village to muddle on by itself. But one last word before I go——

[*The* MAJOR *pauses dramatically—but in the pause* DICKIE WETHERBY, *the* DOCTOR'S *son, comes cheerfully through the French windows. He is not much over twenty. He goes over to his father.*

DICKIE : I say ! Have you seen what's happened ? An awful black and yellow striped tent's just arrived ! An appalling thing ! We can't possibly use it for a big game like Wednesday's !

MR. TWIGG : But I distinctly said a *white* tent. Mr. Robinson promised me personally——

DICKIE : Well, we must do something about it quickly. We've only got a couple of days to get it changed. (*He suddenly remembers a letter he is carrying.*) Oh, look here, Mr. Twigg, here's an express letter just arrived for you. I found the postman running round in circles with it. I told him I thought I should find you here.

MR. TWIGG : An *express* letter !

[*He examines it all over, and nervously begins to open it.*

DICKIE (*turning again to his father*) : You know, really, we simply can't use it ! The committee's looking at it now. We must have it taken away before they begin to like it.

[*He turns and sees the* MAJOR *standing grimly in the corner.*

DICKIE : Hullo, Major ! How's your cold ?

MAJOR (*stiffly*) : My cold's better, thank you.

DICKIE : Splendid ! Can't have you laid up for the big match. (*He slowly becomes conscious of tension in the air.*) I say—I'm sorry—are you having a meeting ?

MAJOR (*coldly*) : The meeting's over.

DICKIE : Good ! I thought I'd butted in. What about having the flag-staff painted ? We must look spick and span to meet Ragholt. It'll be a grand game if the weather holds.

[MR. TWIGG *has been poring over his letter. He looks up, blinking rapidly.*

MR. TWIGG : This is a most extraordinary thing !

DICKIE : What's the trouble ?

MR. TWIGG : Well—what's the " Badger's Green Development Syndicate " ?

DICKIE : The—what ?

MR. TWIGG : " The Badger's Green Development Syndicate."

DICKIE : What on earth are you talking about ?

MR. TWIGG : Well, here's a letter from an old friend of mine, Harry Parker. We were at school together.

DICKIE : What's he say ?

MR. TWIGG : He says : " Dear Twiggy " (*he pauses and looks up apologetically*)—that's only just a bit of his fun. I used to be called "Twiggy" in the old days. He says :—" Dear Twiggy,—I expect you know all about the Badger's Green Development Syndicate. In case you don't, I am writing at once, because it seems such a frightful shame. I met a man named Butler last night. He's got a wonderful scheme to develop your village into a bungalow town. He's going to build bungalows by the hundred on the downs all round Badger's Green——"

DICKIE : *What!*

DOCTOR : Here, give me that !

[*He takes the letter from* MR. TWIGG *and reads it with trembling hands. After a moment he looks up and speaks in a low hoarse voice.*

Good heavens—the blackguards !

DICKIE (*looking over the* DOCTOR'S *shoulder*) : What on earth *is* it ?

DOCTOR : Look what he says : " —bungalows by the hundred on the downs all round Badger's Green. He said he would have to cut down most of the pinewood——"

MR. TWIGG : Oh, but surely not the *pinewood* !

DOCTOR (*continuing to read*) : " He's made a preliminary survey——"

DICKIE (*excitedly*) : Those were the fellows we saw nosing round here last month ! Don't you remember those nasty-looking fat men in bowler hats ?

DOCTOR (*reading*) : " He's coming down on Tuesday to start things going. It seems a great pity to spoil such a lovely place. Yours, Harry." Who's Harry ?

MR. TWIGG : Harry Parker. An awfully nice man. (*He sighs and shakes his head.*) He must be getting on now.

DICKIE : He's coming Tuesday ! To-morrow !

DOCTOR : Look at this leaflet ! " The Badger's Green Development Syndicate is purchasing a large stretch of country round this beautiful little show place——" (*He looks up and repeats hoarsely " show place "*)—" perfectly constructed bungalows will be erected on the estate, with every modern convenience. The enclosed plan shows the projected lay-out——" The unutterable blackguards ! Fancy having this profane leaflet published without consulting us !

DICKIE : Where's the plan ?

DOCTOR : Here it is. (*He unfolds a bright pink plan, and studies it with* DICKIE *looking over his shoulder.*)

DICKIE (*pointing*) : Look ! Bungalows ! Rows and rows of bungalows—all round here !

[*The* MAJOR *has slowly emerged from his dark corner and is now looking over the* DOCTOR's *shoulder.*

MAJOR : What are all those little blue squares along the end of my garden ?

DOCTOR : Those are bungalows. Thousands of bungalows.

MAJOR : Bungalows at the end of my garden !

DOCTOR : Look here ! A golf course ! On Tupney Downs ! Look ! Cinema and Dance Hall !

MAJOR : What's this just opposite my house ? Number six.

[*The* DOCTOR *feverishly searches the key plan at the bottom.*

DOCTOR : Number six—where's Number six ! Here we are ! Number six—Sanitary Laundry !

MAJOR (*wild-eyed*) : A Sanitary Laundry in front of my house ! Not while there's breath in my body !

DOCTOR : Look here ! In Johnson's meadow—Site for Electric Generating Station.

DICKIE (*pointing to the plan*) : Look ! Car Park !

DOCTOR (*in a trembling voice*) : Japanese Tea Garden !

DICKIE : Stand for charabancs.

DOCTOR : Look at this ! " Old Village Green. To be left in its present condition."

MAJOR : Hoh ! That's obliging of him !

MR. TWIGG : What's he going to build opposite *my* house ?

DICKIE : A sewage farm, most likely.

MR. TWIGG : Well, if he does—I'll—I'll blow it up !

MAJOR (*wheeling on* MR. TWIGG) : You've said the word ! We'll blow it up ! We'll blow the whole damn thing up !

DOCTOR : Wait just a moment. We must think.

MAJOR : Think ! Think—when he's coming down to-morrow to ruin the village ! There's no time to *think* ! It's time to act !

DOCTOR : But we must act with thought. (*He pauses.*) I don't think any of us quite realise yet—what this means.

MAJOR : We'll kick the devil out !

DOCTOR : I can hardly believe that Sir John would sell those downs.

MAJOR : What does he care ? He never lives here.

MR. TWIGG : Well, he might have given *us* a thought.

[*There is a moment's pause. Then the* DOCTOR *speaks, his voice is tense and quiet.*

DOCTOR : Are you prepared to fight ?

MAJOR : Fight ! Thank God I'm not too old to fight yet !

DOCTOR : —to fight what may be a hard and difficult battle ?

MAJOR : To the end !

DOCTOR : Would the village back us if we fought ?

MAJOR : To a man !

DOCTOR : We shall not only be fighting for our homes ; we shall be fighting for our honour against a contemptuous insult. To think any man dare lay out this scheme behind our backs —to carve up our village and make this plan !

MAJOR : We'll chuck him out neck and crop !

DOCTOR : Wait a minute. It might be fatal to do anything hasty and ill-considered. We must meet him for what he is—a crafty business man. We must fight him with his own weapons. Physical violence might be a great mistake.

MAJOR : It's the only thing he'd understand.

DOCTOR : We must only use violence in extremity. We'll rouse the village to fight, but keep a firm hand on it until it's necessary to let go. When he comes, we shall ask him to meet us. You and I, Major, and Mr. Twigg will meet him shoulder to shoulder. We three men represent Badger's Green as no other men do—*our* decision is the *village* decision. We shall tell this man we refuse to allow him to build here. We shall order him to cancel his plans and leave.

MAJOR : To think of the pinewoods being hacked down !

DOCTOR : We mustn't allow details to dominate our plans.

MAJOR : Details ! You call the Pinewood a detail ?

DOCTOR : We must keep the broad principles in mind and fight clearly—we must begin at once ; every obstacle must be put in his way——

MAJOR : What about a few good sharp nails in the road ?

DOCTOR : I've said we must reserve physical force until moral force has failed. Dickie ! Go down to the Blue Boar, and tell Mr. Rogers that if a stranger comes he must refuse him food and drink. Tell him I'll make up the loss.

DICKIE (*going to the windows*) : Righto !

MAJOR : And if you see that new policeman explain the whole thing to him, and tell him to do something about it.

DICKIE (*going out*) : Right !

[*There is a pause. The* DOCTOR *and the* MAJOR *are facing one another.*

DOCTOR : If this man wins, it means the end of all our work—of all we've tried to do for Badger's Green.

MAJOR : He won't win !

DOCTOR : He can't—if we stick together——

MAJOR : —and fight together——

DOCTOR : We've not a moment to lose.

MAJOR : Well—let's *act* ! What shall we do first ?

DOCTOR : Well—let me see——

MAJOR : I know ! I'll go down to the Blue Boar and have a mass meeting. You go and get the Vicar going.

DOCTOR : No ; we'll keep the Vicar in reserve. I'll come with you to the Blue Boar. We'll *both* speak.

MAJOR : Well—don't let's waste time.

[*They go out together, talking.*

DOCTOR : It's an insult to the whole village !

MAJOR : I've never heard anything like it ! We'll soon have the village up in arms !

[*Their indignant voices die away.* MR. TWIGG *is alone. He is sitting at the table deep in thought, his arms resting upon his open Minute-book.*

MARY *comes in with a white cloth and a plate of bread and butter. She pauses, surprised to see* MR. TWIGG *there alone.*

MARY : Will you be staying to tea, sir ?

MR. TWIGG (*starts, and looks embarrassed*) : Oh—er—no, Mary. I don't think I shall be staying——

[*There is a pause.*

MARY : Would you mind me laying the cloth, sir ?

MR. TWIGG : Er—yes—do !

[*He gathers up his Minute-book, and goes slowly towards the windows with the book under his arm.*

MARY *lays the cloth and turns. Her eye falls upon* MR. TWIGG'S *letter, which lies on the carpet where it has been dropped by the* DOCTOR. *She picks it up.*

MARY : Is this your letter, sir ?

MR. TWIGG : Oh—yes—thanks (*he looks up at* MARY *and smiles rather proudly*), an *express* letter. (*He turns and goes slowly towards the windows.*)

MARY (*picking up his panama hat from chair*) : Your hat, sir.

MR. TWIGG (*smiling*) : Oh, thanks. (*He goes down the garden path.*)

THE CURTAIN FALLS

ACT II

SCENE I

The library of DR. WETHERBY'S *house towards twelve o'clock next morning.*

The DOCTOR *and the* MAJOR, *looking very important in morning coats, are supervising* DICKIE *and* MR. TWIGG, *who are struggling to get a table through the door.* DICKIE *is pulling ;* MR. TWIGG, *at present out of sight in the passage, is pushing. The* MAJOR *is holding an inkpot and some blotting paper to put on the table when it is through the door.*

DOCTOR : Don't pull it ! Ease it gently. It's no good trying to force it.

MR. TWIGG (*outside in the passage*) : Try tilting it a bit.

DICKIE : That's no good. You can't get the legs through like that.

MAJOR : Try lifting it a bit.

MR. TWIGG : I can't lift it.

MAJOR : You've got the leg caught in the carpet. If only you'd lift it.

MR. TWIGG (*petulantly*) : I tell you, I *can't* lift it.

MAJOR : Of course you can.

MR. TWIGG : Well, come and try yourself. Give it a twist, Dickie——

[DICKIE *gives it a twist, but it becomes more firmly wedged.*

DICKIE : It's absolutely stuck.

MAJOR : What on earth are we going to do if he comes now ?

DOCTOR : It's all right. It's no use getting excited. It's only ten minutes to. We must get it right back and start again.

MAJOR : Well, we'd better buck up. If only he'd lift the damn thing.

DOCTOR : Get it back into the passage, Mr. Twigg.

MR. TWIGG : It won't come.

DOCTOR : Push it, Dickie.

[DICKIE *pushes.*

DICKIE : It's no good.

MAJOR : Lift your end, Twigg.

MR. TWIGG : I'm certain you can do it if you give it a twist.

DICKIE : I *have* given it a twist.

MR. TWIGG : Not a proper twist.

MAJOR : Well, come and do it yourself—if you *know*——

MR. TWIGG : I've had tables get stuck like this before.

MAJOR : Well, that doesn't help if you can't *do* anything.

MR. TWIGG : I can't from here.

MAJOR : Well, come and do it this side.

MR. TWIGG : I'll soon show you what I mean.

[MR. TWIGG *comes crawling over the table—but only his head has appeared before the* DOCTOR *calls out.*

DOCTOR : Don't do *that* ! You'll press it down firmer—get under !

MR. TWIGG : I can't get under.

DOCTOR : Well, go round, then.

[MR. TWIGG's *head disappears. The* MAJOR *and the* DOCTOR *are obviously restless and ill at ease.*

MAJOR : I don't know why we couldn't have used this one. (*He fingers the small round table they used the previous day for the committee meeting.*)

DOCTOR : How *can* we meet him at a silly little table like that ? He'd laugh at us.

MAJOR : Well, how's he going to get in if we can't move that one ?

DOCTOR : We shan't see him till we are ready. I intend to keep him waiting in any case. I've told Mary to show him into the breakfast-room.

MAJOR : We ought to have measured it before we tried to get it through.

DOCTOR : We've had it in here before—lots of times.

[MR. TWIGG *has come round by the front door, and hurries in through the French windows. He also is wearing a morning coat, with spats.*

MR. TWIGG : I'm certain it only wants a quick twist, and a pull——

MAJOR : Well, do it !

[MR. TWIGG *goes to the table, and gives it a little twist. In some way he has released it, for he is able to pull it into the room.*

MR. TWIGG (*his face wreathed in smiles*) : There you are.

MAJOR : Well, for goodness' sake don't stand there smirking.

MR. TWIGG : I don't know why you couldn't have done that.

MAJOR : Well—buck up—what's the time ?

DOCTOR (*consulting his watch*) : Six minutes to. Now then, bring it across here.

[DICKIE *and* MR. TWIGG *carry the table over to the fireplace, followed by* DOCTOR.

MAJOR (*rubbing the door-frame with his finger*) : He's taken all your paint off. What a clumsy fellow he is.

DOCTOR (*directing*) : That's right—a little away from the wall, so that we can get in and out. Now, Major ! The ink and blotting paper.

[*The* MAJOR *steps forward smartly and puts the ink and blotting paper on the table. He then stands back and looks at the table critically.*

MAJOR : I should have the table broadside to the door, so that when he comes in you and I and Twigg will be sitting facing him—shoulder to shoulder.

MR. TWIGG : That's a good idea. Facing him—shoulder to shoulder.

[*They move the table accordingly and stand back to look at it.*

DOCTOR : No, I don't think so. It looks too formal. Too much like a tribunal.

MR. TWIGG : Yes, it *does* look rather like a tribunal.

MAJOR : Well, it is a tribunal, isn't it ?

DOCTOR : Hardly a tribunal. We don't want him to think we're seriously concerned. Just sit along behind it—I'll have a look.

[*The* MAJOR, MR. TWIGG *and* DICKIE *get chairs, and sit along behind the table. The* DOCTOR *looks critically for a moment, then goes out of the door and returns to get the effect.*

DOCTOR : No, it's too formal—too grim. It would flatter him, and make him think we were afraid of him. Bring it round a bit—that's better. (*They move the table a little.*) It looks more casual if we sit like that. It'll make him feel he's just a passing nuisance.

MR. TWIGG : A pen. There's no pen ! What about a pen ?

DOCTOR (*quietly*) : All right. Don't get excited. Dickie, a pen.

[DICKIE *brings a pen from the desk.*

After all, it *is* only a small affair. We've all faced bigger troubles than this.

MAJOR : Good God, yes. What's the time ?

DOCTOR : I make it—just four minutes to.

MAJOR : We'd better buck up.

DOCTOR : I think we're practically ready. (*He pauses and looks thoughtfully at the table.*) Oh, I know—a bottle of water and a glass. (*He goes to the door and calls.*) Mary !

DICKIE : What about chairs ? I suppose you'll let him sit down ?

DOCTOR : Oh, yes. Certainly he can sit down if he wants to. We shall want—let's see—four chairs for ourselves, five altogether—or do you think his secretary will come too ?

DICKIE : Certain to, I should think. Probably a dictaphone and a couple of typewriters as well.

[MARY *comes in.*

MARY : Did you call, sir ?

DOCTOR : Yes, Mary. I want you to bring the water-bottle down off my washhand-stand. See that it's *full*, with a clean glass over the top —as quickly as possible.

MARY : Yes, sir.

[*She goes out.*

DOCTOR : Now, let's see—what were we doing ? (*He thinks.*) Oh, chairs. The secretary can sit on this one. (*He pulls forward the chair from his desk.*) Now we only want one for Mr. Butler. Bring one out of the hall, Dickie.

DICKIE : Which one ?

DOCTOR : Oh, the—er—hard one.

DICKIE : Righto.

[DICKIE *goes out.*

MAJOR : Don't you think a soft one? If we make him feel at ease, we might catch him off his guard.

DOCTOR : No, it's morally wrong to do that. We must fight fair ! Now then ! (*He looks at the table and thinks.*)

MAJOR : What about a few sheets of paper, for notes, etc. ?

DOCTOR : Yes—on my desk, Mr. Twigg.

MR. TWIGG : One sheet before each ?

DOCTOR : Yes, and a few extra sheets in the middle of the table.

[MR. TWIGG *gets the paper and places a sheet before each chair.*

Don't you think we ought to have a few books of reference ?

MAJOR : No. Clear table—a clear hand. Napoleon never had anything but an inkpot on his table.

MR. TWIGG : He must have had a pen.

MAJOR : Of course he had a pen ! What do you *think* ?

[*The* DOCTOR *breaks in as* DICKIE *arrives with a chair.*

DOCTOR : Ah ! Come along, Dickie. (*Taking the chair.*) Now then—three behind the table.

[*The* DOCTOR *gives directions.*

My armchair in the centre—that's right. Mr. Butler can sit here—so (*he places the chair in the centre of the room*)—and his secretary here (*he moves a chair slightly behind* MR. BUTLER'S *chair*).

DICKIE : Where do I sit ?

DOCTOR : Oh, just here. (*He places the other chair slightly behind those at the table.*) You can be my secretary, Dickie. You jot down agenda, memoranda, etc., and don't you talk too much.

MR. TWIGG (*fingering the chair in the centre*) : Don't you think Mr. Butler might sit just a little——

DOCTOR (*sharply*) : Leave it alone.

MR. TWIGG (*letting go quickly*) : I'm sorry.

DOCTOR : What's the good of arranging things if you interfere. I know perfectly well where Mr. Butler ought to sit.

MR. TWIGG : Well, I only thought——

DOCTOR : Well, for goodness' sake don't be a nuisance. We've quite enough to do as it is. (*He looks anxiously at his watch.*)

DICKIE : I suppose I can join in and say something now and then ?

DOCTOR : I'd rather you didn't, Dickie. This matter requires very careful handling—discretion's not your strong point, you know. We're going to meet an artful business man.

MAJOR : What do you make the time ?

DOCTOR : Two minutes to.

MAJOR : Well, that girl had better buck up. It surely doesn't take half an hour to fetch a water-bottle ?

DOCTOR : Yes, where is that lazy girl.

[*He goes to the door and meets* MARY *coming in.*

Come along, come along. Now just in the middle of the table, Mary—slightly to the right—so that it's beside my elbow when I lean over the table. That'll show that I'm the—er—principal person. (*He turns to* MARY.) Now you understand exactly what to do when Mr. Butler arrives ? Ask for his card, and enquire whether he has an appointment. Then usher him into the morning-room. Give him *The Times* to read ; then come and tell me he is here. I shall instruct you to go to him and say I am engaged for the

moment, but won't keep him long. You will then wait until I ring the bell. You will then usher him in.

MARY : Yes, sir.

DOCTOR : Very well. Thank you, Mary.

MARY : I give him *The Times* to read, sir ?

DOCTOR : Yes, here you are. (*He takes "The Times" from his desk, and gives it to* MARY.)

MAJOR : Wouldn't it be better if she gave him *The Times* when she goes back to say you're engaged ? That would look as if he'd got longer to wait.

DOCTOR : All right, Mary, thank you.

MARY : When shall I give it 'im, sir ?

DOCTOR : As I explained to you.

[MARY *goes out, a little mystified.*

The DOCTOR *turns coldly to the* MAJOR.

DOCTOR : I do wish you wouldn't contradict me in front of my servants, Major.

MAJOR : Well, surely, a suggestion.

DOCTOR : I prefer to consider suggestions in private.

MR. TWIGG : Don't you want the pink plan ? You arranged to tear it up in front of him.

DOCTOR : Er—yes—the plan—where is it ?

[*They search feverishly for the plan.*

MAJOR : We had it here last night.

DICKIE : It ought to be easy enough to find—it's bright enough.

DOCTOR : In the drawing-room, Dickie. I was looking at it after breakfast. Quick ! Before he comes !

[DICKIE *rushes off to get the plan.*

MAJOR : It must have gone twelve.

DOCTOR : Only just. We're all ready now, I think.

MR. TWIGG : Can we smoke at the meeting ?

DOCTOR : Certainly not.

MAJOR : Good heavens, no !

[DICKIE *arrives with the plan.*

DOCTOR : Ah, Dickie, on the table. No ; I'll bring it out of my pocket at the right moment.

[*As he puts it in his pocket, the* MAJOR, *who has wandered to the window, gives an exclamation.*

MAJOR : Here they come !

MR. TWIGG (*running to the window*) : Where ?

DOCTOR : Don't let them see you looking !

MAJOR : Is that the secretary ?

DICKIE (*looking over the* MAJOR's *shoulder*) : It must be.

MAJOR : By jove, she's a nice looking girl.

[*The* DOCTOR, *despite himself, is drawn to the window, and looks on tiptoe over the* MAJOR's *shoulder. Then he collects himself and comes away.*

DOCTOR : Major ! Mr. Twigg ! Do, please, come away.

[MR. TWIGG *slinks away from the window, the* MAJOR *remains peering out.*

MAJOR : Well, she *is* a winner.

DOCTOR : Major !

MAJOR : All right. You're getting jumpy. (*He comes sulkily away from the window.*)

DICKIE : He's not such a bad-looking chap.

DOCTOR : It's absurd to let him see you all staring at him.

DICKIE : He can't see us.

[*They all shrink back a little as a man, followed by a girl with an attaché case, passes near the windows on the way round to the front door. The bell rings. They all start slightly.*

MR. TWIGG : There they are !

DOCTOR (*quietly*) : All right—we know. Keep calm. If he sees you're excited and flustered it'll make it harder for us.

MR. TWIGG : Where do *I* sit ?

DOCTOR (*pointing to the chair at the right of the table*) : There !

MAJOR : I should have thought *I* ought to be on your right.

DOCTOR : All right, then. Mr. Twigg, you sit there—on the left.

MR. TWIGG (*touching the seat*) : Here ?

DOCTOR : Yes.

[MARY *comes in.*

Yes, Mary ?

MARY : A gentleman to see you, sir. With a lady.

[MARY *gives a card to the* DOCTOR. *He reads it and looks over his glasses at* MARY.

DOCTOR : Very well, Mary. Tell him I'm engaged for the moment, but I shall be able to see him presently.

MARY : Very good, sir.

DOCTOR : Did you give him *The Times* ?

MARY : No, sir. 'E took it.

[*She goes out.*

MAJOR : He would.

DOCTOR (*pondering over the card*) : Herbert William Butler, address in High Holborn—as I thought. (*He looks up and speaks briskly.*) Now—we are absolutely clear ? Is there any point of any kind we are not decided on ?

MAJOR : Flat refusal.

DOCTOR : Certainly. We don't know how he will attack. We must be ready to parry every blow.

MR. TWIGG : When are you going to tear up the plan before his eyes ?

DOCTOR : At the end of my first speech. Now then—are we all ready ?

MAJOR : Yes.

[*The* DOCTOR *takes the handbell and rings it.*

(*Pointing at the bell.*) Butler's death knell ! (*He laughs a little wildly.*)

DOCTOR : Sit down.

[*They seat themselves as arranged. There is silence. Soon* MARY *pushes open the door, says :* " Mr. Butler and—lady."

MR. BUTLER *comes briskly in, followed by his* SECRETARY. *He is a tall, pleasant man.*

MR. BUTLER : Doctor Wetherby ? (*He pauses.*) Oh, I'm sorry. Am I interrupting a meeting of some kind ?

[*The* DOCTOR *rises and speaks with care.*

DOCTOR : No, sir. I must introduce myself. I am Dr. Wetherby, the gentleman on my right is Major Forrester ; on my left is Mr. Twigg. We take a very keen interest in this village. We protect it. We understand you have something to say.

MR. BUTLER (*somewhat embarrassed*) : Well—er——

DOCTOR : Will you sit down, sir ? (*He motions to the other chair.*) That chair is for your secretary.

[MR. BUTLER, *the* DOCTOR *and the* GIRL *sit down.*

MR. BUTLER : Well, I really only wanted a little informal chat, Dr. Wetherby.

DOCTOR : Information has fallen into our hands, Mr. Butler, that makes us feel this is *not* a matter for an informal chat.

MAJOR : Hear ! Hear !

DOCTOR : We have seen your plans.

MR. BUTLER : Oh, you have ? Good ! Well, perhaps you'd like me to go into the scheme and explain it. I'm not a jerry-builder, or anything like that. I've got a big scheme to provide houses in the country for people of moderate means. If a man wants to live in the country at present, he's either got to take a big house he can't afford, or else a little cottage without any convenience at all. I'm going to supply just what he wants—something between the two. Nice little houses, close together to be friendly ; with electric light, and gas, and water, and sporting facilities. I've picked on this place because it's just right. Decent healthy woods—chalk soil—pleasant outlook. I'm buying up a lot of land round here. Naturally it's going to mean a lot to your village. It's going to open things up, and bring money into the shops. You see, when I've finished building, you'll be right in the middle of it.

DOCTOR : Is that all you have to say ?

MR. BUTLER : Well, I thought we might put our heads together. I think we can help each other quite a lot, you know.

[*The* DOCTOR *rises again.*

DOCTOR : It was only yesterday, by chance, we heard of your plans. It's a great pity you didn't consult us before you began. We could have saved you a lot of time and trouble.

MR. BUTLER : Oh, I don't think you could have helped much at first—we had to do the surveying and all that.

DOCTOR : I don't think I mentioned the word "help," Mr. Butler. I mean we could have saved you the trouble of starting. Certain papers fell into our hands yesterday ; they explained all we require to know. It is your intention to vandalise our village—to build crude places of amusement——

MR. BUTLER : Oh, but I'm not going to put up any eyesores !

MAJOR : Are you going to tell us that a Steam Sanitary Laundry isn't an eyesore ?

MR. BUTLER : It depends on the way it's built. You'd hardly know the one I'm going to build *was* a laundry.

DOCTOR : I must make things quite clear, Mr. Butler. We are not objecting to progress. We encourage progress in the right direction. We are not country yokels ; but we do know sufficient of the world to keep a few corners of it clean. We met last night and decided unanimously to forbid your building here.

MR. BUTLER : Oh, but I say ! You can't do that !

DOCTOR : From a strictly legal point of view we can't. But if you try and build bungalows on these downs, the hand of every man, woman, dog and cat in this village will be against you.

MR. BUTLER : Well, that's absurd !

DOCTOR : You will see whether it is absurd. When a whole village rises up in protest, no one

can avoid the consequences. You may find the wheels will come off your brick-waggons, your scaffolding may collapse in the night ; rubbish may choke your drains——

MR. BUTLER : What about the police ?

DOCTOR : Police-Constable Parsons will help as far as his other duties allow.

MR. BUTLER : Well, if I was interfered with like that, I should have to go and see the magistrate.

DOCTOR : I am the magistrate. It's useless to argue further. We're busy men ; we have other appointments this morning. We've no more time to give you.

MR. TWIGG (*in a hoarse whisper to the* DOCTOR) : The plan ! What about the plan ?

DOCTOR : What? Oh, yes. (*He gropes quickly in his pocket and addresses* MR. BUTLER.) Among other papers that fell into our hands yesterday was this (*he flourishes the plan from his pocket*)—a plan of your scheme to vandalise our village. This, Mr. Butler, is what I think of your plan——

[*He takes hold of it to tear it across, but evidently it is made of very tough fabric, for it will not tear.*

The DOCTOR *tugs hard without result.*

MR. BUTLER (*turning to his* SECRETARY) : Make a note to order some more of that plan paper. Good stuff !

MAJOR (*to the* DOCTOR *in an undertone*) : Try tearing the other way.

[*The* DOCTOR, *quivering with anger, turns the plan and tries again. It gives with a harsh, ripping sound. The* DOCTOR *throws the pieces aside.*

DOCTOR : That, Mr. Butler, is what I think of your plan. And the whole village thinks the same.

MR. BUTLER : I don't think the whole village does. I was talking to the landlord of the Blue Boar this morning. He's all out for my scheme ; he sees what it's going to mean to him. I left him planning out a big dining-room, and a lot of bedrooms. He's going to turn his old stables into a garage.

DOCTOR (*aghast*) : Rogers !

MR. TWIGG : Oh, but it can't be Rogers !

MR. BUTLER (*nodding*) : Mr. Rogers, of the Blue Boar.

[*There is a pause before* MR. BUTLER *speaks again.*

Do you really think it fair to prevent him adding ten pounds a week to his income ?

DOCTOR (*with sudden wrath*) : We are the men who look after Badger's Green—not the innkeeper ! You've had our decision. We are determined to oppose your scheme. (*He turns to the* MAJOR.) Do you agree, Major ?

MAJOR : Certainly !

DOCTOR : Mr. Twigg ?

MR. TWIGG (*starting slightly*) : Er—yes. Absolutely.

DOCTOR (*quietly*) : I think that ends the matter, Mr. Butler.

[*There is a pause.* MR. BUTLER *gives a slight shrug, and rises as if to go.*

MR. BUTLER : Well, gentlemen, I must say it's a big disappointment. I was hoping a lot of good might have come out of this talk. Most building schemes in the country go wrong because there's no link between the old people and the new. A builder just comes along and puts up a lot of houses ; the people who buy them never get a chance of understanding the country and

taking a pride in it, because there's nobody to show them ! They never get to know the village people. They generally get up against them, and everybody's miserable.

DOCTOR : Exactly ! " Everybody's miserable." So why do it ?

MR. BUTLER : Because no one's tried doing it the right way. I know it's difficult, but I think you gentlemen could have done it. You see the enormous possibilities of it ? The villagers down here would do anything for you. I could see that this morning. You understand them absolutely. But the great point is you are not villagers yourselves. You are men of the world. You would understand these new people just as you understand the villagers ; you could bring the old and new together. The village would still be Badger's Green ; it would be three times as big, but it would still have the same spirit if you kept a guiding hand. You would get that marvellous energy that comes from blending the best of the old with the best of the new.

DOCTOR : It may be all right in theory, Mr. Butler—but in practice—— (*He smiles and shakes his head.*)

MR. BUTLER : Why shouldn't it be done ?

DOCTOR : It's never happened before.

MR. BUTLER : Because the right men have never come forward to do it. *I* couldn't do it—I don't know the village people. None of the villagers could do it—they wouldn't understand the newcomers. *You* are the only men who could do it, because you understand the outlook of both sides. (*He pauses.*) It would have been a fine thing to have done. A unique thing. (*He pauses. There is silence until he proceeds.*) Take just one point. The question of health, Doctor. What you could have done for people who've

had years of indoor work. They'd get a new lease of life if they were shown the way to make the most of the open air. I was hoping you would advise me as to the healthiest positions to build. I wanted to have a little hospital somewhere down in the valley. I hoped you would have advised me in fitting it up. I thought perhaps you would supervise it. It wouldn't have meant a lot of your time if we had good nurses in charge—but it would have meant a lot to these people if you gave them the same care that you give these villagers. (*He pauses.*) I do hope you'll think it over, Doctor, and see if you can reconsider it.

[*The* DOCTOR *makes no reply. He sits deep in thought.* MR. BUTLER *turns to the* MAJOR.

MR. BUTLER : Then there's the question of sport. You've got to get people keen, and there's only one way to do that. You've got to find a real organiser to lead them. I want to lay out a golf course—tennis, bowls, hockey—good healthy games ; and I want the right team spirit. It's only a leader who can bring team spirit—and leaders are not easy to find. You can understand why I got excited when I heard people talking in the village about the way the games are run down here. I knew there must be a pretty good organiser behind the village sports to get through a programme of thirty races in two hours.

MAJOR : Twenty minutes out of that was the tea interval.

MR. BUTLER : You got through a whole programme in an hour and forty minutes ?

MAJOR : There's nothing in that—if you know what you're doing.

MR. BUTLER : Then why do most sports meetings drag on till it's dark ?

MAJOR : Because there's no proper organisation. Generally there's half a dozen people trying to run the thing.

MR. BUTLER : Exactly ! They can't trust one man to do it ; they generally have stupid little committees that squabble all the time. You see what I mean, Major ? If we had one real leader to organise the whole sports, we might do anything ! Look what you do at present with a handful of people ; then think of having three times as many to select your teams from. We might send tennis players to Wimbledon—men from the Bowling Club might play for the county. We should have to see that the small routine work didn't fall on your shoulders. Each club would have its own secretary, and you would organise and run the whole thing.

MAJOR : You wouldn't want a secretary for each club. If you combined golf and tennis in one club, and bowls and hockey in another, you could run the whole thing with two secretaries, and probably save twenty or thirty pounds a year.

[MR. BUTLER *throws out his hands in a gesture of admiration.*

MR. BUTLER : There you are !

MAJOR : The golf course could be in the valley —and the Club House on the spur of Tupney Downs. The whole course would be in view from there.

MR. BUTLER : A splendid idea ! (*He turns to his* SECRETARY.) Make a note of that.

[*The* MAJOR *leans forward impressively, and repeats the gist of his suggestion slowly but crisply, for the* SECRETARY'S *benefit.*

MAJOR : Golf—in valley. (*Pause.*) Club House —spur Tupney Downs (*pause*)—whole course —thereby—in view——

[*The* Doctor, *who has been lost in thought, gradually becomes aware of the* Major's *words. He turns to him.*

Doctor : As we decline to help Mr. Butler, why make suggestions ?

Major : Well, damn it——

Mr. Butler (*breaking in*) : But, Doctor, I did hope you'd give the matter consideration——

Doctor (*breaking in quietly*) : We may have judged you a little hastily, Mr. Butler ; but our duty lies in protecting Badger's Green.

Mr. Butler : But I'm not going to touch the village !

Major : I think a man ought to do all he can for other people.

Mr. Butler : If someone in the village were very ill—don't you think a hospital nearby would be very valuable ?

Doctor : There's a serious fault in your plan there, Mr. Butler. The chief troubles of city workers are traceable to the lungs. The valley is damp, but it's dry on the ridge, and the pinewoods have a natural curative property——

[*There is a pause before the* Major *indignantly breaks in.*

Major : Oh, no, you don't ! D'you think we're going to have a nasty-looking hospital on the spur of Tupney Downs, in full view of the golf and tennis ? *No*, thank you ! You put your hospital in that field behind the churchyard and save transport !

Doctor (*icily*) : Is illness a theme for lewd jokes ?

Major (*laughing*) : Well—damn it——

Doctor : Is golf to be considered before the sick ?

MAJOR : *Certainly !* Health comes first every time. You leave Tupney Downs alone. I'm not going to have a smell of iodine on the golf links to oblige you !

DOCTOR : If I decide that a hospital shall be built on the spur, it *shall* be on the spur !

MR. BUTLER (*hastily*) : I think I know a fine place ! You know where the pines slope into the valley over there ? (*he waves a hand*)—why not make a clearing and have the hospital right in the woods ?

DOCTOR : We might do that ! It would be good to have a kind of sun-trap, open towards the south. (*He pauses.*) I know the place—where's that plan ?

[*He takes the plan out of the fireplace and pieces it together.* MR. BUTLER *comes over, and the three of them pore over the map.*

DOCTOR : Look ! Just here ! Cut away the trees a bit, and you've got your view.

MAJOR : Yes, but the Golf Club House will be here. The first green would be right in your damn sun-trap.

DOCTOR (*angrily*) : Will you understand once and for all that sports will not be considered until the hospital site has been selected !

MAJOR (*almost shouting*) : Now, look here, I've had quite enough of your stupid, selfish ideas !

DOCTOR (*breaking in, white with fury*) : And so have I of yours ! If we have any more trouble from *you*, Mr. Butler and I will dispense with your services altogether and get a more reasonable man to organise the sports. Don't you agree, Mr. Butler ?

MAJOR : Well ! If that isn't the ruddy limit !

MR. BUTLER : I do hope we can arrange things so that everybody's satisfied.

MAJOR : I'm always prepared to give and take. But I do resent your attitude. I'm not a child.

DOCTOR : No one suggested you were.

MAJOR : Anyone would think so by the way you talk to me.

DOCTOR (*calm again*) : Well, there's no need to have a scene. We'll do our best to meet one another fairly.

MR. BUTLER : That's fine.

MAJOR : You can rely upon me to be reasonable—but I certainly shan't undertake a responsible job like this without a free hand.

DOCTOR (*poring over the plan again*) : There's a point here, Mr. Butler—you've got a children's playground marked—but there are far too many trees round it. There's a much more open place just here, where you get the sun all day. Don't you think so, Major? This field at the bottom of Mr. Twigg's garden—it only means taking Twigg's chicken-run away.

MAJOR : Yes, that's all right. It'd be a great improvement on Twigg's chicken-run. It smells terribly in the summer. He never cleans it out.

DOCTOR : Come outside, Mr. Butler; I can point out where I mean.

[*The* DOCTOR *busily gathers up the two pieces of the plan and goes towards the door with the* MAJOR *and* MR. BUTLER. MR. TWIGG *has been sitting quite still with a look of bewilderment on his face. He suddenly jumps to his feet as he sees the others leaving. He is quivering with excitement.*

MR. TWIGG : Well, I never heard anything like it in all my life!

MAJOR : Like what?

MR. TWIGG (*almost sobbing with indignation*) : Like *what*, you say! Why, like you! Didn't we

have a meeting last night for three hours? Didn't we make up our minds to kick him out? And now look what you've done?

MAJOR: What on earth are you shouting about? Can't you see the whole position's changed? We didn't realise Mr. Butler's intentions last night. We only knew half the story.

MR. TWIGG: We knew everything! We knew he wanted to build a lot of ugly bungalows! And now you just give in—just because he soft soaps you!

MAJOR (*angrily*): What a fool you are! Can't you see an inch before your nose?

MR. TWIGG: I can see a long way farther than you can! You're turncoats! That's what you are!

DOCTOR (*quietly*): There's no need for bad language, Mr. Twigg.

MAJOR: He's mad.

[DICKIE *can keep quiet no longer.*

DICKIE: Are you sure you are doing the right thing, father?

MAJOR: Look there! Your own son now!

DOCTOR: I asked you not to interfere, Dickie.

[MR. BUTLER *gently takes the* DOCTOR'S *arm, and draws him out into the garden; the* DOCTOR *glances back, half appealing, half indignant, at his son. The* MAJOR *pauses before following the others into the garden, draws himself up and throws a few last words at* DICKIE.

MAJOR: When you're a little older, my boy, you'll learn that the greatest test of courage is to change your mind when you realise you're wrong.

[*He goes with dignity into the garden.*

DICKIE *and* MR. TWIGG *are staring after him.*

The GIRL *sits quietly in her chair.* DICKIE *turns to* MR. TWIGG.

DICKIE : Look here, I'm not going to stand for this ! Don't you see how he's done it ?

MR. TWIGG : Soft soap !

DICKIE : He's done it by flattery—he's got round them by a trick !

MR. TWIGG : Well, he didn't get round *me* !

DICKIE (*pausing and turning to the* GIRL) : I'm awfully sorry about all this.

THE GIRL (*smiling*) : That's all right.

[DICKIE *turns to* MR. TWIGG.

DICKIE : He's turned them round his finger ! He's heard the Major was keen on sport, and offers him a lot of impossible things. He knows my father would do anything for the village, so he promises a hospital ! If he'd known you kept chickens he'd have built you a poultry farm !

MR. TWIGG (*helplessly*) : Yes, but what can we do !

DICKIE : I'm going to shove my word in now ; as hard as I damn well can !

[*He strides determinedly out of the windows.*

The GIRL *rises ;* MR. TWIGG *turns back into the room and speaks to her.*

MR. TWIGG : Did you ever hear anything like it—in all your life ! Here we sat for hours and hours last night and kept on agreeing to fight together—and now look what's happened !

THE GIRL : I do understand—exactly—how you feel !

MR. TWIGG (*suspiciously*) : Yes, but surely——

THE GIRL : I know. I'm Mr. Butler's secretary——

Mr. Twigg : Then we're—we're against each other.

The Girl : We may be on the surface. But I'm certain we feel the same underneath. We both want to keep the country as it is ; but development's bound to come ; nobody can stop it. Isn't it rather a question of making the best of it—of seeing that it's done carefully ?

Mr. Twigg : It's these ugly bungalows I can't stand.

The Girl : But they're not ugly. They're specially designed to suit the country.

Mr. Twigg : Well—I—I can't help that.

The Girl : London gets worse to live in every year, and people want the country more. It's rather rough on them to find the country people against them.

Mr. Twigg : But look at the bottles and paper, and—bits of pie they throw about.

The Girl : Those are the people who don't live in the country ; they just come for the day. If they lived here they wouldn't do that sort of thing.

Mr. Twigg : I'm glad you—you feel like I do about things.

The Girl : If we can make people really comfortable out here, they'll take a pride in the country. Don't you think we could plan out ways of making people keen on country life ? When I saw you out on the Green this morning, I thought how much you could help in that way.

Mr. Twigg : Did you—see me ?

The Girl : Wasn't it you—with a butterfly net ?

Mr. Twigg : Well, yes. I was out this morning. I—I didn't know anyone saw me. Some people think it's rather silly.

THE GIRL : I don't see why. People don't think fishing silly, or hunting or shooting.

MR. TWIGG : That's just what I always think.

THE GIRL : It's not nearly so cruel, either.

MR. TWIGG : I don't do it in any way out of blood lust. I do it as a study. I always carry a lethal box and drop them straight in. They don't suffer any pain. I always keep it rather secret. The Major laughs and makes jokes about it in front of me at parties.

THE GIRL : He doesn't understand.

MR. TWIGG : I'm glad you think like that.

[*There is a pause.* MR. TWIGG *seems embarrassed and agitated.*

You know—you're not a bit like most girls.

THE GIRL (*laughing*) : I'm sure I am.

MR. TWIGG : You're not, really. Most girls with ideas like yours are plain.

THE GIRL : Oh, but——

MR. TWIGG (*hastily*) : No, really—I mean it ! You're so different. (*He stops and goes on nervously.*) D'you feel a—a sort of sympathy between us ?

THE GIRL : Don't you ?

MR. TWIGG : Er—yes ; I—I do. I felt it directly you came in. I always feel rather—lonely about the country. You see I was born here, but I had to take over my father's business in the City. I—I didn't like it really ; so I came back here.

THE GIRL : It would be splendid if we could work together and make people understand. Couldn't we arrange a series of talks about country life ?

MR. TWIGG : Do you think they'd really care ?

THE GIRL : Wouldn't you care—to have your eyes opened to lovely things ? We could give talks in the evenings ; and the next afternoon we could take them for a ramble.

MR. TWIGG : And I could illustrate my lecture with actual specimens in their wild state !

THE GIRL : You would let me come ?

MR. TWIGG : Why, yes! Of course! You wouldn't perhaps—er—consider being, as it were, my assistant ?

THE GIRL : Rather ! I'll work the lantern at the lectures.

MR. TWIGG : Could we have a magic lantern, and show slides ?

THE GIRL : We should have to. You'd have to point out things in the pictures with a long stick——

MR. TWIGG : —and tap the floor with it every time I wanted you to put in the next picture !

[*They both laugh together.*

THE GIRL : We'll have terrific fun.

MR. TWIGG : We'd do a lot of practical work. I'm not all theory you know. I could show them how to stuff fish.

THE GIRL : Why—can you stuff fish ?

MR. TWIGG : Oh, yes—I—I stuff all my own fish.

THE GIRL : I've often wondered how it's done.

MR. TWIGG : Well, it's not easy. It's messy at first. You must expect to spoil one or two. I should make people begin with little ones. You have to be careful to empty the fish completely, or you're bound to get trouble afterwards. Then you hold the fish in shape with frames ; if not, it looks just like a sausage, you know.

THE GIRL (*smiling*) : I know.

MR. TWIGG : Then you dry it, and pack it with sawdust. Then you varnish it to make it look wet.

THE GIRL : I often wondered how you make them look wet.

MR. TWIGG : Just varnish, that's all. Then you want three blue beads for the eyes.

THE GIRL : Three ?

MR. TWIGG : It's best—in case you break one. Of course, most fish have brown eyes, but I always use blue beads—they give vitality. Then I always make the case myself out of fretwood.

THE GIRL : You do fretwork too ?

MR. TWIGG : Oh, yes. You must come and see my home one day. I made almost everything in the house out of fretwood. I'm doing a big job now—but it's rather secret. I'm making a coat-rack for the cricket match to-morrow, to hang in the marquee on the Green. It'll stop people throwing their coats on the ground and getting their watches trodden on.

THE GIRL : You're making it as a surprise ?

MR. TWIGG : Well, I told the Major and the Doctor, but they're so funny. I'm the slow bowler of the team—and they're afraid I might go and hurt myself. But I'm so keen on having it finished. There's only the holes to take the pegs, and it's done. (*He pauses and thinks.*) I could teach fretwork. I would take people round to my workshop.

THE GIRL : We must have a committee meeting on our own, and fix up crowds of things.

MR. TWIGG : I never met anyone before who was really interested. You don't know how nice it is.

THE GIRL : We'll have to work very hard.

MR. TWIGG : We shall have to lead them along a little at a time ; simple lectures at first, gradually working up to bigger things. I'm glad to feel I can help people like that.

[*Voices are heard approaching from the garden. The* DOCTOR *and the* MAJOR, DICKIE *and* MR. BUTLER *return.*

MR. BUTLER : Well, really, gentlemen, I must say you're very hard to understand. I lay my plans before you and explain them as clearly as I can. You decide to help——

DOCTOR : We made no definite decision.

MR. BUTLER : Yes, but you were very favourably disposed—and then in five minutes you allow your boy to talk you round again. It's absolutely a workable scheme. We are all men of the world, and after all, your boy's very young.

DOCTOR : There's a great deal to consider, Mr. Butler.

MR. TWIGG : Yes, but Doctor—you said just now——!

DOCTOR : All right, Mr. Twigg. We know exactly what *you* think. I'm sorry, Mr. Butler, we must have time. We can't decide now.

MR. BUTLER : That's quite all right, Doctor. There's no need to. I'm staying the night in the village. I'm going to London to-morrow evening to meet my partners, so I'll call in the morning for your answer. I'm sure we shall work together.

[*He smiles pleasantly and goes to the windows.*

Good morning to you, gentlemen.

[*He goes through the windows. His* SECRETARY *follows, but for a moment she hesitates, and, unseen*

by the others, gently presses MR. TWIGG'S *limp hand.*

There is silence in the room for quite a while before the DOCTOR *speaks.*

DOCTOR : I'm glad we were firm.

MAJOR : I'm jolly glad I saw through him when I did——

DOCTOR (*quietly*) : We made a mistake.

[*Silence falls again. A somewhat nondescript person comes nervously up the path. He is wearing white rubber shoes, grey flannels, a dark waistcoat, and an open cricket shirt. He taps on the window-frame and peeps in.*

THE MAN : Beg your pardon, Doctor ; we was wondering if you'd forgot about the cricket practice.

[*The words have a remarkable effect. The* DOCTOR *shakes off his gloom, squares his shoulders, and speaks in a firm voice.*

DOCTOR : We're coming right away, Grover.

GROVER : We've mended that big 'ole in the net, sir.

DOCTOR : Splendid !

[*He nods to the* MAN *with a smile. The* MAN *goes away. The* DOCTOR *turns briskly to the others.*

Can't you see our mistake !—to have met him like *this* ! (*He indicates his morning coat, which he pulls off and throws on a chair. He rolls up his sleeves, goes to the sideboard and pulls a pair of white shoes from the cupboard. He sits down and changes his shoes.*) We flattered him ! We treated him with respect, and he thought we were afraid ! When he comes to-morrow, we'll meet him in our cricket flannels—and tell him to go to hell ! (*He turns to his son.*) Dickie, get the ball, there's a good fellow. It's on the mantelpiece in the

breakfast-room—and my pads—the old ones ! Don't touch the others.

DICKIE (*going out*) : Righto.

MAJOR : With all those stout fellows at the back of us, he won't dare to do anything !

DOCTOR : Of course he won't ! It's bluff ! He's just a bluffer. (*He rises with his white shoes on, and turns to* MR. TWIGG.) Mr. Twigg, *you* know how that table goes through the door—take it back into the dining-room, there's a good chap !

[MR. TWIGG *has been standing rather sadly at the windows, gazing over the Green. He blinks once or twice, shakes his head to throw off his dreams, and slowly begins to clear the papers from the table.*

MAJOR (*rolling up his sleeves*) : It's like Drake, isn't it ? Playing bowls, and then going out and beating the Spaniards ! (*He laughs heartily.*)

[DICKIE *returns with the ball, pads, and a bat.*

Ah ! Dickie ! that your new bat ?

DICKIE : I've had it most of the season.

MAJOR (*examining it critically*) : Got a crack here. Be careful about that. Bind it with some tape.

[MR. TWIGG *has got the table to the door, and pushed it half way through. He stands undecided for a moment—nearly climbs over it, but hesitates. He turns and goes out through the French windows.*

DOCTOR (*twisting the ball artfully between his fingers*) : This time to-morrow we shall be just getting ready for the match. All ready ? Come on ! Half an hour's good practice before lunch.

MAJOR (*looking round*) : Where's Twigg ? He must get in some bowling practice.

DOCTOR : He was here just now—he was moving that table.

MAJOR : Look where he's left it ! What a queer fellow he is.

DOCTOR : Never mind—he'll find out where we've gone—thank God for some fresh air.

[*They go together down the path and across the Green.* MR. TWIGG *has apparently reached the other end of the table, out in the hall, for it gives a little twist, and slowly disappears through the door.*

THE CURTAIN FALLS

SCENE II

Towards noon on Wednesday. Another lovely day.

The room is empty. There is a tap on the door, a pause, and the MAID *comes in. She looks round, and speaks to someone in the passage.*

MARY : The Doctor's out on the Green practising 'is cricket. Come in, Mr. Rogers. I'll go and tell 'im.

MR. ROGERS : No ; don't bother 'im, miss—if 'e's out cricketing. I'll wait a bit.

[MR. ROGERS *is plump and shiny, with a fat face and heavy-lidded eyes. He sits down, pulling up the knees of his tight, shiny trousers.*

MARY : 'E said 'e'd be back before twelve—it's gone 'arf-past eleven.

MR. ROGERS : That's all right.

[*There is a pause.*

Lovely day for the match.

MARY : Grand.

MR. ROGERS : Think we're goin' to win ?

MARY (*archly*) : Depends 'oo you call " we."

MR. ROGERS : Er course—you got connections with Rag'olt, ain't you ?

MARY : 'Erb's their wicket-keeper.

MR. ROGERS : Well, you *are* in a predicament and no mistake ! Fiancé on one side—boss on the other ! 'Oo'er you going to shout for ?

MARY : I ain't the *sort* that shouts.

MR. ROGERS : Well, 'oo'er you supporting ?

MARY : Both.

MR. ROGERS : Sort o' Jack o' both sides ! *Jill* o' both sides, I *should* say. (*He laughs and repeats the joke to himself for memory's sake.*) *Jill* o' both sides.

MARY : You come about the trouble, Mr. Rogers ?

[MR. ROGERS *immediately becomes secretive.*

MR. ROGERS : Trouble ? 'Ow d'you mean ?

MARY : Well, *you* know what I mean ! You oughter seen the carryings on up 'ere yesterday —*shouting* at each other, they was.

MR. ROGERS : It ain't no laughing matter.

MARY : I *ain't* laughing.

MR. ROGERS : Nor a matter for public discussion.

MARY (*after a pause*) : No.

[*Silence falls.* MARY, *somewhat abashed, tidies the room a bit, and goes to the windows.* MR. ROGERS *sits, breathing heavily and blinking.*

'Ere's the Doctor—comin'.

[MR. ROGERS *rises and pulls down his trousers where they have rucked up tightly round his knees. The* DOCTOR *and the* MAJOR *are heard approaching. They come through the gate and up the path. They are both in white flannels and striped cricket caps ; both carry coloured blazers over their arms, and a few pads and bats. They are mopping their brows with large handkerchiefs.*

DOCTOR (*as they come up the path*) : Have an early lunch and then a lie-down. Can't have you getting tired.

MAJOR : You'd better take a rest, too. It's going to be scorching out there this afternoon.

[*They come into the room.*

DOCTOR : Ah ! Rogers. You want the new scoring-book. Here you are.

[*He goes to the desk and produces a large flat book, which he hands to* MR. ROGERS.

MR. ROGERS : Thank you, sir. (*He hesitates.*) As a matterer fact, sir—there was another thing I just wanted a word about.

[*The* DOCTOR'S *face becomes grim.*

DOCTOR : Yes ?

MR. ROGERS : I'm sorry to 'ear, sir, about your attitood over Mr. Butler. (*He pauses.*) 'Er course —I know it ain't nice 'aving strangers butting in——

DOCTOR : Well ?

MR. ROGERS (*very embarrassed*) : Well, all the same, a man of business 'as got to look *after* 'is business——

DOCTOR : Mr. Butler must go and look after his business somewhere else.

MR. ROGERS : Yes, sir, but that wasn't exactly my meaning. You see, trade's never too good ; custom's limited 'ere. Another couple of 'undred people living 'ereabouts would make a power of difference—what with their friends comin' to see 'em—wanting beds for the night——

DOCTOR : Are you thinking now of the village or yourself ?

MR. ROGERS : I'm thinkin' of all us folks in trade.

DOCTOR : Do I assume you are speaking on behalf of *all* the traders in the village ?

MR. ROGERS : Well, sir, some of us 'ad a bit of a talk at my place last night.

DOCTOR : In the face of the knowledge that the Major, Mr. Twigg and myself were fighting to save you from this man ?

MR. ROGERS : Well—I——

DOCTOR : You doubted us—after all we do for the village ?

MR. ROGERS : Nobody's denying what you gentlemen do, Doctor—but we just feel we oughter move with the times.

DOCTOR : Your father kept the Blue Boar ; did he ever hanker after " moving with the times " ?

MR. ROGERS : Well, 'e got all the new business what come in with bicycling—but I'm denied the motoring folks, 'cos of the roads. If Mr. Butler opened things up, it'd make a power of difference to me, and all of us trade folk.

DOCTOR : Has Mr. Butler told you that he intends to build a large hotel here ?

[MR. ROGERS' *jaw drops.*

MR. ROGERS : No ?

DOCTOR : Naturally he didn't. He is a deceitful man, Rogers. Take very great care. He intends to build a large hotel with gold letters six feet high, lit up by night. A string band will play ; your customers will flock there and you will be ruined. But there's no need for you to worry. We are fighting him and we shall win. Now look here, I want you to be very careful in starting this new score-book : the last one got hopelessly muddled and very dirty towards the end. The scorers *must* dry their fingers after tea. I found

butter on several pages, and a piece of watercress in the binding. You must carry a penknife, too—and score with a sharp pencil. Also I don't like the enormous noughts you draw when a batsman is unfortunate and fails to score. It's an irritating habit of yours. (*He looks at his watch.*) Good gracious ! It's nearly twelve ! You'd better see about getting the scoring-board across to the marquee. And do tell the boy to be more careful in collecting the numbers together afterwards. I found a 7 in the grass last night.

MR. ROGERS : I've bin looking all over the place for that 7 !

[*The* DOCTOR *goes to the sideboard and brings out a tin number plate with a large white 7 on it.*

DOCTOR : I can't imagine how it was left. Doesn't the boy *count* them ?

MR. ROGERS : 'E ought to.

DOCTOR : Well, do see that he does. All right, Rogers. I'll see you later. And once again, don't worry. You can trust me to protect the Blue Boar from ruin.

MR. ROGERS : Well, it's very good of you, Doctor, but——

DOCTOR (*with a wave of his hand*) : Don't thank me for doing my duty. I'm not a man to stand by and watch you go to the workhouse.

[*The* DOCTOR *smiles, and waves a friendly dismissal.*

MR. ROGERS *disappears uncomfortably through the French windows.*

The DOCTOR *turns to the* MAJOR.

DOCTOR : Have a glass of lemon squash ?

MAJOR : I will, thanks—I'm as dry as a bone.

DOCTOR : Say when——

MAJOR : Woh ! That's enough.

DOCTOR : Soda—or water ?

MAJOR : Water, I think. It's more quenching.

DOCTOR (*filling the* MAJOR's *glass*) : You have to look after these people like a nurse. (*He hands a glass to the* MAJOR *and takes one himself.*) Well, here's to our success this afternoon !

MAJOR : Hear ! hear !

[*They drink and sit down. The* DOCTOR *suddenly looks very tired.*

DOCTOR : I *do* wish we hadn't got this trouble hanging over our heads, on a day like this of all days. (*He sighs.*)

MAJOR : Let's forget all about it. Let him come and find us like this. It'll make him think.

[DICKIE *comes in, also dressed in flannels, and a college blazer.*

MAJOR : Ah, Dickie ! Feeling pretty fit ?

DICKIE : Fine, thanks ! Have you been out practising ?

MAJOR : Yes, we've had half an hour. It's beginning to get hot. It'll be scorching this afternoon.

DICKIE : How are you bowling ? All right ?

MAJOR : Pretty good.

DICKIE : I'd like to have a knock—are you going out again ?

MAJOR : Yes ; we came in to see if Twigg was here. Have you seen him ?

DICKIE : He said he'd be here at eleven. He's got to have some practice this morning to get his fingers loose.

MAJOR : He *is* the limit. Forgotten all about it, I expect.

DICKIE : I saw him as I came back from the village—he was in his workshop. I heard his fretsaw working.

[*There is a tense silence. The* DOCTOR *and the* MAJOR *look at one another in sudden fear.*

DOCTOR (*slowly and quietly*) : Did you say—in his workshop ?

DICKIE : Yes, I saw his head through the window.

DOCTOR : I told him to keep right away from his fretwork till after the match to-day.

MAJOR : He promised faithfully he would ! Are you certain it was Twigg ?

DICKIE : It couldn't have been anyone else.

MAJOR : I've a good mind to burn that damn workshop down ! You know what he is with his fretwork. Don't you remember that pipe-rack he made ? The awful cuts he got ? He couldn't play the organ for a month. He'll never finish a coat-rack alive !

DOCTOR : I can't believe he would break a promise.

MAJOR : I don't know. He behaved very suspiciously when we spoke to him about it. Don't you remember the way he shuffled his feet and wouldn't look us in the eye ?

DICKIE (*at the window*) : Here he comes now, across the Green.

DOCTOR (*with intense relief*) : Thank goodness for that !

DICKIE (*staring hard across the Green*) : Good God !

MAJOR (*starting up*) : What is it, Dickie ?

[DICKIE *turns into the room.*

DICKIE : I'm afraid something's happened—he's got his arm in a sling, his left arm, his bowling arm !

[*There is silence. The* DOCTOR *and the* MAJOR *stand as if turned to stone.*

MAJOR (*in a trembling voice*) : It's that damn coat-rack ! There isn't another slow bowler in the village if Twigg can't play !

[*The* DOCTOR *speaks. His words come hoarsely and brokenly.*

DOCTOR : If Twigg's betrayed us—if he's broken his promise—if he's been doing his fretwork and cut his hand—I shall never, *never* speak to him again.

MAJOR (*clenching his hands*) : My God, I'll give him hell !

DOCTOR : Leave *me* to deal with him, Major. I'm President of the Club.

MAJOR : It's the captain's job ! You leave him to me !

[*Silence falls. The* MAJOR *and the* DOCTOR *stand back in the shadows and gaze at the open, sunlit window.*

Presently, in the silence, MR. TWIGG *creeps in. He is dressed in an old tweed suit—he is hatless and pale. His left arm is slung in an old green handkerchief, his hand protrudes, covered in a bulky, ill-made bandage. He hesitates on the threshold, blinking to accustom his eyes from the glare of the sunlit Green. He sees the* DOCTOR *and the* MAJOR *standing like pale statues in the shadows. He gives a little shudder, and looks at them in dumb appeal. There is no word for a while. Then* MR. TWIGG *speaks in a thin, dry voice.*

MR. TWIGG : I'm awfully sorry. The chisel slipped.

[*Again there is silence. Then the* DOCTOR *speaks ; his words come like an icy stream.*

DOCTOR : Five minutes ago, Mr. Twigg, I thought of you as a friend of mine ; an honourable man whose word was his bond. Now I know you to be a deceitful man—a man who puts his own mean selfish pleasure before the honour of the village at cricket.

MAJOR (*quivering with anger*) : You—*bloody* fool !

DOCTOR : You care nothing for the village—you craved only to flaunt your fretwork before the eyes of strangers.

MAJOR : D'you suppose anybody was going to care a damn for your idiotic coat-rack ?

DOCTOR : You've ruined our chances in the match this afternoon, the match above all others that we hoped to win.

MAJOR : —— dirty—low-down trick.

DOCTOR : I've nothing further to say, Mr. Twigg, except that the village is the sadder by knowing it has in its midst a man who breaks his word.

[MR. TWIGG *has stood quite still, gazing in front of him with an expression of unspeakable misery. The corners of his mouth quiver, he gives a little choking sigh and covers his face with his uninjured hand. He sways, and* DICKIE *quickly steps forward.*

DICKIE : Look out ! He's fainting !

[DICKIE *steadies* MR. TWIGG *and leads him to a chair. The pale anger in the* DOCTOR'S *face softens to shame ; he is by* MR. TWIGG'S *side, soothing him.*

DICKIE : Undo his collar !

MAJOR : Put a key down his neck !

DOCTOR : All right, Major, all right. Leave him to me. (*He turns and calls.*) Mary ! Mary ! (*He*

picks up the bell, rings it and turns back to MR. TWIGG. *He speaks very softly.*) I'm very, very sorry, Mr. Twigg.

MR. TWIGG (*through convulsive sobs*) : I—feel—so beastly. I just want to go and die.

DOCTOR : Dickie ! Run and get a basin of water and my surgical box.

[DICKIE *hurries away, passing* MARY, *who hurries in.*

MARY : Did you ring, sir ?

DOCTOR : Yes, Mary. Bring the decanter of brandy. Here's the key.

[MARY *hurries away.*

MR. TWIGG : I—I don't think I can take any brandy.

DOCTOR : Just a nice drop of sherry ?

MR. TWIGG : Well—just a small drop.

DOCTOR : Major ! A glass of sherry.

[*The* MAJOR *hurries to the sideboard.*

You must try and forgive me, Mr. Twigg. I behaved like a beast.

MR. TWIGG : I didn't *want* the chisel to slip.

DOCTOR : Of course you didn't.

[*The* MAJOR *returns with the flagon of sherry ; he pours out a glass and hands it to* MR. TWIGG.

MAJOR : Here—put that inside you.

MR. TWIGG : I—I don't think I can take it after all. I—I feel so frightfully funny—all over.

MAJOR : Come on, drink it up !

[*He pushes the drink into* MR. TWIGG's *hand with rough kindliness, and turns away, muttering " Damn fool ! "* MR. TWIGG *rolls his eyes miserably over the edge of the glass and takes a sip.*

The door opens and MRS. WETHERBY *hurries in.*

MRS. W. : Arthur, what *has* happened ? Poor Mr. Twigg ! (*She goes over to* MR. TWIGG *in dismay.*)

DOCTOR : It's all right, Mabel—it's quite all right !

MR. TWIGG (*almost proudly*) : The chisel slipped.

MRS. W. : Can't I do anything ? Why ! you haven't given him a cushion ! (*She gets a cushion and stuffs it behind* MR. TWIGG.)

DOCTOR : Now then, let me have a look. I must dress it properly. (*He begins to unwind the ungainly bandage from* MR. TWIGG's *hand.*)

MRS. W. : Mrs. Forrester's in the breakfast-room, helping with the tea. Hadn't she better go for Mr. Twigg's housekeeper—or shall I send a message ?

MR. TWIGG : Oh, you are so kind—but don't bother, please. My housekeeper fainted when she saw what I'd done, but she was coming to all right as I left.

[MRS. FORRESTER, *the* MAJOR's *wife, hurries in.*

MRS. F. : Has Mr. Twigg hurt himself ? (*She sees the bandage being unwound.*) Oh—dear——

MAJOR (*testily*) : It's all *right*, Joan. Don't fuss.

[*The* DOCTOR *is coming towards the end of the bandage, which begins to be rather bloodstained. He very tenderly removes the last portion.* MR. TWIGG *winces in pain, but keeps quite quiet.*

DOCTOR (*soothingly*) : *There* we are ! (*He examines the finger carefully.*) Oh, yes—it's nothing serious —a nasty cut, but not dangerous.

MAJOR (*peering at the finger*) : Will he be able to play ?

DOCTOR : My dear Major—look ! (*he holds up the finger*)—the finger he spins the ball with.

MAJOR : What a fool the man is !

[DICKIE *hurries in with the bowl of water. He puts it on the small table beside the* DOCTOR, *removing the flagon of sherry to the floor beside* MR. TWIGG.

MARY *hurries in, very distressed.*

MARY : I don't think you gave me the right key, sir ; this one don't turn.

DOCTOR : Never mind, Mary, we shan't want the brandy after all.

[*There is a ring at the bell.*

MRS. W. : I expect that's Mrs. Bunting with the scones. Take them into the breakfast-room, Mary.

MAJOR (*to his wife*) : Hadn't you better be getting on with the tea ? It's past twelve, they'll be round with the trolley soon.

[*The* LADIES *go slowly towards the door.*

MRS. W. : *Do* say if you want anything, Mr. Twigg—won't you ?

MRS. F. : I'll go and fetch your housekeeper, if you like ?

MAJOR : Don't *fuss*, Joan—get on with the teas.

[*The* LADIES *go out.*

Extraordinary what a fuss women make !

MR. TWIGG : I was being so careful. I'd finished the whole thing. There was just a little bit of rough stuff to take off one end. I used the chisel, and it slipped.

DOCTOR (*carefully re-dressing the wound after bathing it*) : Never mind, Mr. Twigg. The coat-rack's going to be fine, hanging up in the marquee. It'll stop all the coats being thrown on

the ground. You *have* done something for the village, after all.

MR. TWIGG : Well, I do try.

[*The* MAJOR *is pacing irritably to and fro ;* DICKIE *is gazing gloomily out of the window.*

MAJOR : What on earth are we going to do ? With Hobson on the sick-list and Jones away, there isn't a man in the village fit to put in the team.

DICKIE : What about Rogers ?

MAJOR : He's hopeless. He's always so bleary in the afternoons.

DICKIE : Well, who on earth *is* there ?

[MARY *has come in, and is hovering nervously in the background. She addresses the* DOCTOR.

MARY : There's Mr. Butler, sir.

[*There is a general start of surprise ; the* MAJOR *looks at the* DOCTOR *in dismay.*

MAJOR : Good heavens ! I'd forgotten *that* wretched man was due !

DOCTOR : We can't see him ! We've enough trouble as it is. Tell him we can't see him, Mary.

DICKIE : Just a minute. What *about* Mr. Butler ?

MAJOR : What d'you mean ?

DICKIE : He's not such a bad fellow. They tell me he was talking at the Blue Boar last night. Apparently he's played a bit of cricket.

MAJOR : You're not suggesting he plays for *us* ?

DICKIE : Why not ?

MAJOR : I wouldn't be seen dead playing with him.

DICKIE : Even if it made the difference between winning or losing against Ragholt ?

MAJOR : Even if it means that !

DOCTOR : Er—Mary, wait outside. We'll let you know our decision in a few moments. (*He turns to* DICKIE.) He'd never play—even if we asked him, Dickie.

DICKIE : You don't often find a keen man refusing a game. Besides, what's to prevent us playing a deeper game as well ? He told us yesterday he's got to catch the six o'clock from Winchester.

MAJOR : Well ?

DICKIE : Can you imagine any man leaving for a train in the middle of an innings ? Or just as he's got his length with the ball ?

MAJOR : No, I can't. I do see your idea—but it's very dangerous.

DICKIE : He'd never leave if the game were getting thrilling ; suppose he lost his train and missed his meeting ?

MAJOR : It's a long chance.

DICKIE : Isn't it worth it ? To fill our team, and possibly knock his plan on the head ?

MAJOR : Supposing he *did* go—halfway through ?

DICKIE : Well, at least we'd have him a couple of hours—he may be a useful man.

MAJOR : Well, I don't mind. They say " all's fair in love and war," don't they ?

DOCTOR (*absently*) : Er—yes. (*He goes to the door and speaks to* MARY.) Ask Mr. Butler in, Mary.

DICKIE : We must flatter him. Butter him up a bit.

MAJOR : What shall we do ? Say we've heard he's a great cricketer ?

DICKIE : No, be careful. Not a " great " cricketer. Begin by saying we've heard the villagers talking about him.

MAJOR : That's the line ! Look out !

[MARY *opens the door and ushers* MR. BUTLER *and his* SECRETARY *in.*

MR. BUTLER (*jovially*) : Ah, Doctor ! *You* look like business !

DOCTOR : Er—yes. We've got our most important match to-day. Er—will you have a glass of sherry, Mr. Butler ?

MR. BUTLER (*surprised*) : That's very nice of you.

[*They look for the sherry bottle which is down behind* MR. TWIGG'S *chair, where* DICKIE *put it when he brought in the bowl of water.*

DOCTOR (*searching*) : That's funny. Mary must have taken it away.

[*He goes towards the door, but* MR. BUTLER *detains him.*

MR. BUTLER : Please don't bother, Doctor. I've just had the pleasure of meeting your wife. She's got a wonderful pile of tea out there.

DOCTOR : Yes ; we're trying to do everything as well as possible. We are playing our great rivals —a village called Ragholt.

MR. BUTLER : Is that the place you come through—just before here ?

DOCTOR : Yes, in the valley ; you drop down into it from the main road.

MR. BUTLER : Charming little place. I nearly as possible decided on Ragholt instead of here.

[*The* DOCTOR *and the* MAJOR *exchange excited glances.*

DOCTOR : It's always a terrific game ; but Ragholt has beaten us three years running. We were determined to win to-day. Everything was in our favour ; we have my son with us ; the Major is bowling splendidly this year, and now a most terrible misfortune has occurred.

[*He waves despairingly towards* MR. TWIGG. MR. TWIGG *displays his bandaged hand.*

MR. BUTLER : What a pity !

DOCTOR : Mr. Twigg, our only slow bowler, was completing a coat-rack for the marquee——

MR. TWIGG : The chisel slipped.

MR. BUTLER : How sickening !

DOCTOR : It made a deep wound in the finger he spins the ball with.

[MR. BUTLER *draws in his breath to denote sympathy.*

DOCTOR : You see what an awful blow it is ? You are a cricketer yourself—you understand. We have no other man to play.

MR. BUTLER : How did you know *I* was a cricketer ?

DOCTOR (*laughing*) : Villagers talk.

MR. BUTLER : They don't waste much time. We were having a bit of gossip down at the inn last night—fancy it getting up to you !

DOCTOR : A thought occurred to us just before you came, Mr. Butler. We knew yesterday you were a sportsman—a white man—despite our differences in the world of business. But it wasn't till to-day we knew you were a cricketer. A faint hope came to us——

MR. TWIGG : I'd lend you my white flannel trousers.

MAJOR (*viciously*) : Shut up !

DOCTOR : —a wild hope—that perhaps you would fill the breach.

MR. BUTLER (*shaking his head*) : Well, I'm afraid——

DOCTOR (*interrupting*) : There's no need for me to tell you what our gratitude would be—how the whole village would rise and cheer you.

MR. BUTLER : It's a pity—I'd like to play, but my train's at six from Winchester. I've got a car coming for me at half-past five.

DOCTOR : But we start at 2.30. For three hours we should have you.

MR. BUTLER : But I'm not even a membe of your Club !

DOCTOR : We can soon put that right ! Major, fill in a form ; there's one on my desk.

[*The* MAJOR *hurries to the desk.*

MR. BUTLER : I don't think I dare. Supposing at half-past four, I was batting—and the match was critical——

DOCTOR : We must risk that. We may win the game in two hours.

MR. BUTLER : There's no other train. I meet my directors in London this evening. They've all got their pet schemes to develop other places. I must get my word in to-night.

MAJOR (*looking up from the form*) : Herbert William Butler, isn't it ?

DOCTOR : Yes. (*He dives into his pocket and produces* MR. BUTLER'S *card—he reads* MR. BUTLER'S *address to the* MAJOR—" *Burford House, High Holborn* "—*and hands the* MAJOR *the card.*)

MR. BUTLER : It isn't fair on you or me, if I were to play.

DOCTOR : Have you ever played in a genuine game on a village green ?

MR. BUTLER : Not a real genuine village green.

DOCTOR : It's something you will never forget. The smooth green—the great elms round it—the old houses peering out of the shade—the lovely quiet downs beyond—old Hobson's mare watching over a gate—people lying under the trees—the glorious firm " chock " of the ball against the bat. You won't forget it.

MAJOR (*advancing with the completed form*) : There's a quorum, isn't there ? You and me—and Twigg ? We can have a committee meeting right away. (*He reads.*)

" Member for Election.

Name : Herbert William Butler.

Occupation : Company Director.

Address : Burford House, High Holborn.

Proposed by Doctor Wetherby.

Seconded by Major Forrester."

(*He looks up.*) Those in favour ?

[*The* DOCTOR *and* MR. TWIGG *raise their hands.*

MAJOR : Carried *nem. con.*

[*The* DOCTOR *smiles and shakes* MR. BUTLER *by the hand.*

DOCTOR : The colours are red, green and yellow. Mr. Twigg will see that you get a straw-hat-band. You can't imagine what this means to us, Mr. Butler. It's splendid of you.

MAJOR (*holding out his hand*) : You're a white man, you've made a true friend.

DOCTOR : I've got a splendid idea ! You know the Vicar's little house—next to the Vicarage ? Mr. Butler will take it for a week-end cottage. He'll come and play as a regular member.

MR. BUTLER (*laughing*) : Well—you *are* the limit !

DOCTOR : Wait till you see the cottage. It's a lovely little place. Now—what about clothes for Mr. Butler ? I can fix him up with a shirt and boots.

MAJOR : I can do the trousers—pity Twigg's such a little man. Mr. Butler could have had his things.

DOCTOR : It's half-past twelve ! We must have a look round. Come along, Mr. Butler, you must see the pitch. You *do* bowl, don't you ?

MR. BUTLER : Well, I'm not a left-hander.

DOCTOR : But you *do* bowl ?

MR. BUTLER : A bit.

DOCTOR : Splendid ! Slow ?

MR. BUTLER : Slow medium.

DOCTOR : Magnificent ! You must decide which end you'd like to bowl from. Come along !

MR. BUTLER : I *must* go in five hours' time.

DOCTOR : Five hours ! Empires have been made in five hours.

[*They go out together, talking and laughing.*

DICKIE *lingers behind. The* GIRL *has been forgotten. He turns to her.*

DICKIE : Pity no one introduces us, isn't it ?

THE GIRL (*laughing*) : It is, rather.

DICKIE : My mother's doing tea for the players this afternoon—like to help ?

THE GIRL : I'd love to. Sure I shan't be in the way ?

DICKIE : Everybody who helps'll be in the way. One more or less won't matter. My mother's over at the marquee now, getting things ready. Care to come across ?

THE GIRL : I'd love to. (*She turns to* MR. TWIGG *as they go out.*) I'm so sorry, Mr. Twigg.

DICKIE (*suddenly remembering*) : Oh ! How's the hand ?

MR. TWIGG : A little easier thank you, Dickie. It still throbs a bit.

DICKIE : Keep it slung well up.

[DICKIE *and the* GIRL *go out together.*

MR. TWIGG *is alone, very tired and sad. He feebly sips his sherry.*

THE CURTAIN FALLS

ACT III

SCENE I

The interior of a white marquee which has been pitched to overlook the Village Green.

It has two openings. One looks out towards the cricket pitch, which is just out of view, the other opens to the side. A trestle table stands along the side of the tent between the openings. There is also a small table and two chairs for the scorers. Otherwise the tent is empty. It is a little after midday. The sun is baking the Green outside.

MR. ROGERS *comes in with a pile of tin scoring-numbers under one arm, and the new scoring-book under the other. He is dressed as he was when he went to see the* DOCTOR, *except that he is now wearing a straw hat with a bright band round it, and a pair of white shoes. He is followed by a small harassed* BOY, *who is staggering under the weight of a large scoring-board.* MR. ROGERS *drops the pile of numbers on the trestle table, and turns to the* BOY, *who is trying to get the score-board through the opening.*

MR. ROGERS : What's the good o' trying to get the board in 'ere ? Stand it up outside. No ! not there—over on the right.

[*The* BOY *puts the board up and sighs with relief.*

Now look 'ere, George ! Come inside. There's thirty-two numbers 'ere—see ? And when you take 'em back there's got to be thirty-two—see ? Last week you left one of them seven's out on the grass—lying out there rusting in the rain all night. The Doctor found it 'imself. Don't allow it to 'appen again, see ? Else we'll 'ave Charlie to put the numbers up next week. Now take 'em out and sort 'em on this bit of noospaper. Then cut back for yer dinner. Be 'ere at two-fifteen.

[*The* BOY *takes the numbers and—goes outside.*

MR. ROGERS *picks up the scoring-table and places it with great care so that he can secure a good view of*

the cricket pitch. He then places the chairs behind it. He puts the score-book on the table, produces a pencil, and laboriously sharpens it to a point.

A WOMAN *appears, carrying a large tea-urn, she is followed by a* BOY *with two buckets of cold tea. Behind comes a smaller* BOY *with a bundle of sticks. The* WOMAN *dumps the tea-urn on the table, and removes the lid. The* BOY *with the buckets pours in the tea.* MR. ROGERS *looks on suspiciously.*

You ain't goin' to try and 'ot that tea up in 'ere ?

WOMAN : Mrs. Wetherby said : " Put the urn on the table."

MR. ROGERS : Well, 'ow are you goin' to 'ot the tea up ?

WOMAN : That's none o' my business. I do what I'm told.

MR. ROGERS : What's all them sticks for ?

WOMAN : To make a fire.

BOY : To 'ot the tea up, Mrs. Wetherby said.

MR. ROGERS : You can't light a lot o' sticks in 'ere.

BOY : Mrs. Wetherby said : " Light the sticks outside."

MR. ROGERS : What you want to do's to make a fire outside and 'ot the tea in cans—then pour it in the urn.

[MR. ROGERS' *eye falls on the urn. Nobody has noticed that the tap was turned on when the* BOY *poured the tea in.*

(*Shouting*) Hi ! Look at all that bloomin' tea running out !

[*There is a rush to the urn, but the urn is a new one, and the tap is very stiff.*

Damn thing's stuck. (*He puts his thumb over the spout and turns to the* Boy.) 'Ere—gimme an 'ankerchief!

[*One of the* Boys *produces a dirty handkerchief from his pocket.* Mr. Rogers *winds it round the tap.*

Wants a drop of oil.

[*They struggle with the tap, and finally get it to turn off.*

That's got it. Lucky I noticed when I did.

[Mr. Rogers *carefully removes the handkerchief from the tap and squeezes it into the urn. He removes his straw hat, and wipes his brow with the back of his hand.*

Can't understand why they couldn't 'ave a proper caterer. Silly, leaving a big job like this to amateers. 'Spose they never get the tea 'ot at all?

Woman: Well, arf of it's gorn.

Mr. Rogers: That don't lift the responsibility for what's left.

[*A small* Boy, *propelling a handcart, and escorted by* Mrs. Wetherby *and* Mrs. Forrester, *draws up outside the marquee. They bring in piles of plates, cups, saucers, bread and butter and cake.*

(*Lifting his hat*) Good morning, mam.

Mrs. W.: Good morning, Mr. Rogers. (*She is carrying a small spirit-burning contrivance.*) Do you understand these things? It fits under the urn.

[Mr. Rogers *becomes useful.*

Mr. Rogers: That's it, mam—fits like this. You want some methylated.

Mrs W.: Yes, of course we shall.

Mr. Rogers: You want to 'eat up the tea outside—this'll only do to keep it 'ot.

Mrs. W.: Yes. (*She turns to the* Boy *with the*

sticks.) Charlie—make a nice fire out over there—beyond those trees, so that the smoke won't blow in here.

BOY : Yes, mam.

MRS. W. (*looking into the urn*) : Why, there's not nearly enough tea, Mrs. Evans. We shall want a lot more. Whatever made you put it straight into the urn ?

WOMAN : Well, mam, I thought it was the place.

MRS. W. : We shall have to draw it off into the buckets again. You'll have to make quite a lot more.

WOMAN : Very good, mam.

[*The* WOMAN *goes out with one of the buckets.*

MRS. WETHERBY *struggles with the tap, which won't turn on.* MR. ROGERS *steps forward.*

MR. ROGERS : Allow me, mam. (*He also struggles considerably before it turns.*) Bit stiff—wants a bit of oil.

MRS. F. (*pausing from bringing in the tea things*) : What about a bit of butter ?

MR. ROGERS : That'll do, mam. (*He rubs a piece of butter on the tap.*)

MRS. W. (*to the* BOY *who is catching the tea in the bucket*) : When you've got it all, take it outside to where you are making the fire. Tommy's bringing a big cauldron up from Mr. Hobson's.

MRS. F. : Shall we unpack now ?

MRS. W. : Oh, I think we'd better leave it ; the bread and butter would get terribly dry. We'll cut the cake just before tea so that it's quite fresh.

MRS. F. : Very well. Don't forget to bring the flowers. I'll bring the vases this afternoon.

MRS. W. : And, Mr. Rogers, I *wonder* if you could arrange for some methylated ?

MR. ROGERS : Very good, mam. I'll get Jim to bring up a bottle.

MRS. W. : That's awfully kind of you. (*She takes a glance round.*) Now I think we'll leave everything as it is till this afternoon. I feel nearly dead.

MRS. F. : It's such a big business.

MRS. W. : What time ought tea to be ready ?

MR. ROGERS : Well, it depends on the game, mam. Four o'clock, unless an innings is nearly finished. Then we'd wait. I'll be 'ere all the time, mam. I'll give you the wink.

MRS. W. : Thank you. (*To* MRS. FORRESTER.) Our menfolk'll be clamouring for lunch if we don't go.

[*The* LADIES *leave. The* BOY *has got the bucket filled with tea and is struggling to turn off the tap. The tea is beginning to run over. He calls in a panic to* MR. ROGERS, *who is just leaving the tent.*

BOY : Hi ! Mr. Rogers ! 'Elp with this tap !

MR. ROGERS : It's all right—rub the butter in.

BOY : It won't turn no'ow.

MR. ROGERS : Well, where's the other bucket ?

BOY : Mrs. Evans took it.

[MR. ROGERS *goes to help—struggles with the tap, and finally loses his temper.*

MR. ROGERS : I can't help the damn thing ! Oughter bin seen to afore it was used. (*He looks into the urn.*) Ain't more'n a cupful left. Better leave it.

[*He goes out.*

The Boy *removes the bucket, regretfully watches the remaining tea drain away, and goes out carrying what he has saved.*

Voices are heard approaching.

Doctor (*outside*) : Come and have a look at the marquee, Mr. Butler.

[*The* Doctor, *the* Major *and* Mr. Butler *stroll in.* Mr. Butler *has a pair of white trousers over his arm.*

Doctor : We found it difficult to get a plain white one ; contractors have a perfect mania for supplying hideous striped ones. In fact, we had to send one back ; it was a great rush to get this in time.

Major : It's a lot better than a dusty old pavilion.

Doctor : There's no comparison.

Mr. Butler : You get quite a crowd, I suppose ?

Doctor : We expect eighty or ninety people here to-day ; in fact this weather may bring it up to three figures.

Mr. Butler (*looking at the piles of tea things*) : Why ! Aren't those all the provisions I saw up at your house just now ? You've got them over pretty smartly.

Major : Yes, we have to organise things pretty thoroughly. You can't imagine the details there are to attend to ; we have a special sub-committee to look after it.

Doctor : Now, I think you ought to see the pitch ; there's a slight slope from the farther end. You may find it suits you better than bowling from this end.

Major : You'd better explain to me how you like your fielders placed. It'll save time.

DOCTOR : I hoped my wife would be here—apparently she's gone—but it doesn't matter. I want you to join us in a modest lunch, Mr. Butler.

MR. BUTLER : Well, that's very kind of you, but I do think I ought to go back to the Blue Boar. I'd better pack my bag and bring it with me. The car can pick me up here.

DOCTOR : Oh, but you must lunch with us. If you have it at the Blue Boar, Rogers will give you a heavy plate of red meat—very bad to play on in a hot sun. We are just having a little boiled white fish, and fruit.

MR. BUTLER : Well, it's very good of you, Doctor. It certainly sounds more attractive than steak pudding.

[*They laugh together as they walk to the opening facing the Green. Just outside, the* DOCTOR *points into the distance.*

DOCTOR : There's the little house I spoke about. The Vicar only wants a pound a week. Take it for a week-end cottage, and play for us on Saturdays.

MR. BUTLER : I wish I could.

MAJOR : As a full member of the Club, it's your duty.

DOCTOR : I prophesy Mr. Butler will be a Vice-President in the very near future.

MR. BUTLER : Oh, I haven't deserved that yet.

[THEY *walk out together laughing.*

DOCTOR : Well, now you must come and see the pitch.

[*They go out on to the Green.*

Some BOYS *appear and walk by, carrying some garden seats. The* MAJOR *pauses for a moment to superintend.*

MAJOR : Are those Mrs. Graham's garden seats ?

BOYS (*in chorus*) : Yes, sir.

MAJOR : Well, be most careful with them. The paint was scratched on one last year. See that nobody stands on them.

BOYS (*in chorus*) : Yes, sir.

[*The* MAJOR *goes on to overtake the others.*

DICKIE *and the* GIRL *come through the side opening.* DICKIE *glances round and turns to the* GIRL.

DICKIE : Mother seems to have cleared off. It doesn't matter, though. If you turn up at half-past two and lend a hand, there's bound to be plenty to do.

THE GIRL : I'm certain to be in the way.

DICKIE : That doesn't matter. There wouldn't be enough to do if people didn't get in the way.

THE GIRL : Can I bring anything ? I could buy some fruit in the village.

DICKIE : Oh, Lord, no—there's loads of stuff here. They've allowed four slices of bread and butter per man, with an extra twenty slices to allow for gate crashers.

[*He is looking out on to the Green.*

(*Suddenly he laughs.*) Do look at the Guv'nor out there, stroking the pitch. I believe he knows every blade of grass.

THE GIRL : D'you live with him down here ?

DICKIE : No ; I'm up at Cambridge till next June. I spend most of my vacs here—and work. I don't get time to work much at Cambridge.

THE GIRL : My brother's at Trinity.

[DICKIE *looks at the* GIRL *in astonishment.*

DICKIE : At Trinity ? *I'm* at Trinity !

THE GIRL : D'you know him ?

DICKIE : What's his name ?

THE GIRL : Rawlinson.

DICKIE : What ! Rawly ? He isn't your *brother*—is he ?

THE GIRL (*laughing*) : Yes.

DICKIE : Well, I'm damned. Old Rawly—your brother. And here we've been staring at each other for two days ! He digs quite near me. Do you ever come up ?

THE GIRL : I generally manage to run up once or twice a term.

DICKIE : You know your brother's room in Stanford Street ? I'm just round the corner in Peter Square. Look here—come up and lunch with us this morning. My mother knows Rawly —she met him last term at the May races—were you up there then ?

THE GIRL : Just for the last day !

DICKIE : You must have seen me rowing.

THE GIRL : I must have done.

DICKIE : Of course, your brother's going to be a doctor, isn't he ? So am I.

THE GIRL : To take over here when your father retires ?

DICKIE (*laughing*) : I don't know. The Guv'nor's rather funny about that. He'd like to think so—in a way. He rather loves the old place, he'd hate to think of a stranger butting in. And yet I think he'd like to see me do—something more. After all, it's a fine old place to come to now and then, but I don't think I should like to work here always.

THE GIRL : I think we can work better for knowing there are places like this to come to for a rest.

DICKIE : That's what I feel. I couldn't do my work here—but I shall work better if I know I can come here now and then. But do you see how different it is for old people ? The Guv'nor —the Major—and Mr. Twigg. You see how the village has gradually—sort of—closed round them. There's nothing anywhere else in the world, if they lost what they've got here. It *must* go on as it is.

THE GIRL : I felt that too. But isn't it rather a losing battle ? I mean—isn't it rather like trying to keep back an encroaching sea ?

DICKIE : You can build a dam and turn the sea into other people's land. Don't you think Butler would go somewhere else ?

THE GIRL : I think his mind's made up.

DICKIE : Couldn't you go on strike, or something.

THE GIRL (*laughing*) : I've got to earn my living.

DICKIE : Anyway, you will come up to lunch ?

THE GIRL : Well, I'm afraid Mr. Butler expects——

DICKIE : Oh, damn Butler ! He doesn't *own* you !

THE GIRL : I ought to ask him.

DICKIE : Well, let's catch him before he goes.

[*There is a pause before they go out on to the Green.*

You simply *can't* go this evening—where's Rawly ? Can't I ask him down to stay too ?

THE GIRL : I must go back.

DICKIE : But you must come down again.

[*They walk out together across the Green.*

There has been a certain amount of passing to and fro outside ; BOYS *carrying seats, a man with a couple of dixies, etc. A small* BOY *is passing—he looks back and shouts out :*

'Ere ! Major ses you ain't to climb about on them seats. Go on—'op it. (*He pauses, puts his tongue out, and—passes out of sight.*)

[*The marquee is empty. It is quiet out on the Green. It seems as if everyone has gone to their midday meal. A small* MAN *stealthily looks in through the side opening, satisfies himself that he is unobserved, and comes quietly in. It is* MR. TWIGG. *Under his arm he carries a long, untidy brown paper parcel. He comes to the opposite side of the marquee, and observes a hook in the canvas. He stealthily undoes his parcel, and produces a shaped piece of wood from which several long wooden pegs protrude. It is a coat-rack. He handles it almost lovingly, and hangs it by a cord from the hook. He goes to the opening to see that he is quite alone, returns, and takes off his coat, wincing a little as he pulls the sleeve over his bandaged hand. Carefully he hangs the coat on a peg. The rack tilts, and the coat slips off. He stands in some uncertainty for a moment, picks up the coat and tries again, on a different peg. Once more the coat slides off to the ground. He tries his hat, but it slips off. He stands some while in thought. With a sudden impulse he hangs his coat on one hook and his hat on the other, but both slip off to the ground. He stares for a moment, with drooping lip and expressionless eyes, at the bright shaft of sun that shines through the opening across the grass. Then he takes the coat-rack down, and wraps the brown paper round it. He sees a piece of old canvas lying on the ground. He takes it up, and covers the coat-rack as if it were something unclean.*

THE CURTAIN FALLS

SCENE : *The Marquee, later in the day.*

A remarkable change has taken place from the quietness of the morning. The cricket match is in full swing ; the excitement is growing intense. MRS. WETHERBY *and* MRS. FORRESTER *are relatively unconcerned with the tension on the Green outside ; the climax of the cricket match is of secondary importance to the safe packing of the crockery borrowed for the tea. The trestle table is littered with empty cups and plates ; there is no sign of any food left. They are stowing the tea-things into wooden boxes. A solitary figure lingers at the table ; a red-headed* CRICKETER *with pads on, and a bat in his hand. He is sipping a cup of tea, moistening his lips and starting with fright at every sound from the Green. He is acutely conscious of his coming responsibility.* MR. ROGERS *is sitting at the small table, scoring. Occasionally he turns sideways to sharpen his pencil to a finer point. Beside him sits the* SCORER *who represents the opposing team, a very small man, with a large moustache from which protrudes a pipe. As the scene opens, a cheer spreads round the Green. It is not an organised cheer ; it is a ragged cheer from people scattered under trees or lounging on seats. A* MAN *in flannels rushes across the opening, apparently pursuing the ball. Two small* BOYS *jump up in front of* MR. ROGERS *and dance with excitement.*

MR. ROGERS : 'Ere ! Sit down, can't you ! 'Ow d'you think I can see to score with you in the light !

[*The* BOYS *subside.*

'Oo 'it that ?

BOYS (*in chorus*) : The Doctor !

MR. ROGERS (*turning to his fellow-scorer*) : One to the Doctor !

[*They laboriously record the run in their scoring-books. As they do so, there comes the woody "chock"*

of bat against ball—a more excited cheer and shouts of "Run! Run!" The BOYS *dance frantically in front of* MR. ROGERS, *who becomes convulsed with fury.*

MR. ROGERS : Look 'ere ! I'll send you all 'ome if you don't take care ! Go on ! 'Op it !

[*He makes a ferocious movement as if about to rise.*

The BOYS *fade away—there are cries of "Boundary!" "Four!"*

Four, was it ? 'Ow the 'ell can a feller score with them bloomin' boys about ? Four to Mr. Dickie. (*He puts the runs down and calls to the* BOY *beside the score-board.*) That's 80. Put up 80 !

[*The* BOY *selects a number 8 from the grass and hangs it on the board over a 7. The* MAJOR *hurries in, extremely red in the face and excited.*

MAJOR : Magnificent ! Splendid ! That's just 80, isn't it, Rogers ?

MR. ROGERS : Yes, sir—80.

MAJOR : Fourteen more and we've beaten the blighters ! We'll teach 'em to brag !

[*He crosses to the anxious* BATSMAN *at the table, bursting with advice.*

Don't excite yourself, Morgan. You may have to go in—you may not. It all depends. But, for heaven's sake, don't lose your head ! Play quietly and easily, just as if you were practising !

[MR. TWIGG *rushes in, tremendously excited.*

MR. TWIGG : Fourteen runs to get and the match to win ! We'll do it ! We must do it ! Mrs. Wetherby, aren't you proud of your husband—batting out there—fighting for the village ? And your son—oh, Dickie's a fine boy ! Did you see

him hit that one into the Blue Boar? Right through the tap-room window.

[MR. ROGERS *looks round a little balefully, but quickly turns at the crack of ball against bat and another frantic cheer.* MR. TWIGG *jumps as if shot—turns and runs out on to the Green, waving his arms oblivious to his injured hand, shouting :* " *Oh, good* shot, *sir ! good* shot *! Run ! Run ! Hurrah !* "

MR. ROGERS (*acknowledging the* UMPIRE'S *signal with a dignified wave of his pencil*) : Boundary ! Four. Four to Mr. Dickie.

[*The heads of the* SCORERS *bend over their books as they record the runs.*

MAJOR : Ten to get—my God ! Ten to get ! (*He turns to the* LADIES.) You *must* come and watch—never mind those dirty cups—come along, Joan!

MRS. W. : Arthur *will* be tired to-morrow ! Out there in that awful sun !

MAJOR : Aren't you proud of him ? Look at him now standing out there batting like a hero. Fine old chap ! *He* doesn't lose his head in a crisis like the youngsters ! Give me the old dog for the rough road. (*He suddenly breaks off as another shout comes from the Green.*) Splendid ! Four byes—only six more now.

[*They hurry out together.*

The red-headed BATSMAN *is left alone—a picture of misery—hardly daring to watch or listen. Suddenly there is a cry of* " *How's that ?* " *followed by a sonorous* " *Out* " *from the* UMPIRE. *A groan of consternation drifts in from the Green. The* BATSMAN *at the table starts violently, and drops his cup of tea. The* MAJOR *returns—slowly and quietly—his face suddenly drawn with anxiety. He speaks hoarsely.*

MAJOR : Dickie's out ! (*He looks at the waiting* BATSMAN.) Mr. Dickie's out, Morgan ! Six more runs to get and only you and Mr. Butler to bat !

For heaven's sake play carefully—don't lose your head !

[MR. TWIGG *rushes in.*

MR. TWIGG : Dickie's out !

MAJOR (*irritably*) : I *know* he's out.

MR. TWIGG (*imploringly to the waiting* BATSMAN, *who is now doggedly rolling up his sleeves*) : Oh, Morgan ! It's up to you now ! Keep cool—and calculated.

MAJOR : Keep your legs well out of the wicket !

[*There is some vigorous clapping from the Green.* DICKIE *is seen returning from his innings ; he takes off his cap and smilingly acknowledges the applause.* MR. ROGERS *looks up at the small* BOY *who is waiting enquiringly to put the score on the board.*

MR. ROGERS : Last man : 28. 88 for 8. Last man : 28.

[*The* BOY *searches for the correct numbers to put on the board, and turns anxiously to* MR. ROGERS.

BOY : We ain't got enough 8's.

MR. ROGERS : Go on—we've got six blooming 8's. Use yer eyes.

[*The* BOY *eventually finds one.*

DICKIE *comes in, wiping his brow ; the* MAJOR *runs to him and pats him on the back.*

MAJOR : Well played, Dickie ! Jolly fine—oh ! If only you hadn't got out !

[*He turns and runs over to the* BATSMAN.

Don't be tempted to swipe. Play quietly !

DICKIE (*looking up from removing his pads*) : Keep an eye on that fat man, bowling in the green waistcoat—he makes them spin.

MAJOR : You'd better wear a cap—the sun's getting troublesome.

MR. TWIGG (*feeling the bat*) : Isn't this bat too heavy ? Why not——

MAJOR (*breaking in*) : Don't *worry* him, Twigg—leave him alone ! (*He turns to the* BATSMAN.) Don't for heaven's sake try any short runs—the Doctor's very tired.

[*The* BATSMAN *has rolled his sleeves almost to his shoulders. Without a word he spits on his hands and goes out as if to execution.*

DICKIE : Good luck, Morgan !

MR. TWIGG : Good luck—and God bless you !

MAJOR : Only hit the crooked ones !

[*Applause greets the* BATSMAN *as he appears on the Green. There are shouts of : " Hoora—a—y ! " " Good old Ginger ! " " Good luck, Ginger ! "—and a little excited laughter. The* MAJOR *looks round anxiously.*

Where's Butler ? He'd better get ready to go in !

[*The* GIRL *comes in with* DICKIE's *scarf and blazer. She goes to* DICKIE.

GIRL : Well played ! D'you want these ?

DICKIE (*rising*) : Thanks awfully !

MAJOR : Have you seen Mr. Butler ? It's time he got his pads on.

GIRL : I saw him outside just now.

MAJOR : Well, he may be wanted any moment—let's find him at once.

[*He goes towards the Green as a* MAN *in a non-descript chauffeur's uniform appears at the side opening.*

MAN : Is Mr. Butler 'ere, sir ? Car waiting to take 'im into Winchester.

MAJOR : What ? (*The significance of the* CHAUF-

FEUR's *remark gradually sinks in.*) No—he's—he's not here ! He's busy ! He—he can't come !

MAN : I was told to pick 'im up for certain at 'arf-past five, sir.

MAJOR : I don't care ! Go away ! Can't you see there's a cricket match on ?

[MR. BUTLER *hurries in from the Green, anxiously looking at his watch. He glances up and sees the waiting* CHAUFFEUR.

MR. BUTLER : Ah ! There you are ! (*He turns to the* MAJOR.) What a pity it is !

MAJOR (*aghast*) : But—but good heavens ! You're not *going* ?

MR. BUTLER : It's half-past five.

MR. TWIGG : Oh—but, Mr. Butler ! Six runs to get—and the match to win ! You—you *can't* go !

MR. BUTLER : I'm awfully sorry, but I did definitely say half-past five, didn't I ? Business *must* come before games.

MAJOR : Yes, but not in a crisis like this. Don't you realise—we haven't beaten these blighters for four years, and now all we want are six runs.

MR. BUTLER : You'll get those without my help.

MAJOR : How do we know ? Morgan's very uncertain—he may be out first ball.

MR. TWIGG (*looking through the opening*) : Look out ! Morgan's taking his first ball ! I hope to goodness he keeps his head.

[*They creep stealthily to the opening and gaze out on to the Green.* MR. BUTLER, *despite himself, is drawn with them—the* CHAUFFEUR *sidles over and watches too.*

MAJOR : Look ! He's going to swipe ! Oh, the fool—— !

[*His words fade away. There comes the crisp "chock" of bat and ball, followed by an almost frenzied scream of delight which suddenly dies into something of a groan.*

MR. TWIGG (*excitedly pointing into the sky*) : Look ! Look where it's gone ! Right up there !

MAJOR : The fool ! The idiot ! I told him not to hit blindly like that. Look ! there's a fielder there—he'll catch it—he'll catch it—oh—Morgan—you fool——

[*A* FIELDER *has crept into view, gazing intently into the sky, his hands stretched up with open palms.*

MR. TWIGG : Look at the height it's gone ! Oh, look, it's stopped going up ! It's coming down ! He'll catch it—oh, I can't bear it !

[MR. TWIGG *turns into the marquee and covers his face with his hands, moaning slightly. The others watch, fascinated, petrified—the ball comes hurtling down into the* FIELDER'S *hands—and bounces out—there is a shriek of delight and laughter, cheers, and one or two catcalls. The small* BOYS *suddenly reappear, and dance in front of* MR. ROGERS, *shutting out his view.* MR. ROGERS *rises in a fury and cuffs the* BOYS *out of sight. The laughter and cheers continue—someone shouts out "Butter-fingers !"*

MAJOR : Look—it's going over the boundary !

MR. BUTLER (*excitedly*) : He'll just catch it in time !

MAJOR : No, he won't !

MAN : He's got it !

MAJOR : It's over ! Hurrah ! Four—four. (*He turns to the scorers.*) Put down 4 to Morgan ! Oh—but that was a wild, dangerous hit. (*He turns to* MR. BUTLER.) Two more and we've won—two more !

[MR. TWIGG *has furtively uncovered his face. He turns round.*

MR. TWIGG : Did he catch it ?

[*No one replies. Apparently another ball is about to be bowled ; everyone's eyes are riveted on the Green.*

MAJOR : Look—he's taking another ball ! Heavens ! He's going to swipe again ! Oh—the fool——

[*There is a click of bails—a groan from the Green.*

(*Hoarsely*) He's out ! Morgan's out !

[DICKIE *hurries in from the Green.*

DICKIE : Is Mr. Butler here ? (*He sees* MR. BUTLER.) Thank goodness ! I had an awful feeling you might have gone. It's frightfully decent of you to stay, sir—we all realise what you're doing for us.

MAN : It's twenty to, sir—we'll never do Winchester in less than a quarter of an hour.

MAJOR : Oh, for God's sake, go away ! Go away and puncture yourself ! Mr. Butler isn't going.

MR. BUTLER : But, Major—I can't——

MAJOR : I know you can't !

MR. BUTLER : I mean I can't stay.

[MR. TWIGG *seizes a pair of pads and throws one to* DICKIE.

MR. TWIGG : Quick ! Put his pads on !

[DICKIE *and* MR. TWIGG *kneel down in front of* MR. BUTLER *and feverishly strap the pads on his legs.* MR. BUTLER *stands in helpless indecision. The* MAJOR *addresses him.*

MAJOR : Can you stand there, Mr. Butler, with English blood in your veins, and desert a cricket team—with two runs to win ?

[MR. BUTLER *turns to the* CHAUFFEUR.

MR. BUTLER : You'll have to wait.

[*The* CHAUFFEUR *touches his cap and disappears to watch the cricket.*

MAJOR : You won't regret this, Mr. Butler. As captain of the team I shall propose you as a Vice-President at the next meeting.

MR. BUTLER : That's very good of you, Major.

[MR. TWIGG *and* DICKIE *complete the strapping on of* MR. BUTLER'S *pads, while feverish activity passes outside.*

MR. ROGERS *has instructed the* BOY *to put up the score :* " *92 for 9. Last man 4.*" *The red-headed* BATSMAN *has returned in dejected silence to the tent, with one or two half-hearted hand-claps and* " *'Ard luck, Ginger* " *from a tolerant friend outside.*

There are anxious enquiries of " *Ninety-two, isn't it ?* "—" *Two more to win ?* "—" *Oh, my !* " *etc.*

MAJOR : The whole village looks to you now, Mr. Butler. I'm certain you'll do it.

MR. BUTLER : I'll do my best. *I'm afraid I'm not much of a batsman.*

[*The* MAJOR *thrusts a bat into his hands,* MR. BUTLER *turns and grimly steps towards the Green.* DICKIE, *the* MAJOR, *and* MR. TWIGG *stand back a pace—and clap their hands. The applause is taken up vigorously as* MR. BUTLER *appears outside.*

MAJOR : We can't be in suspense much longer now ! In a moment we shall know the worst.

MR. TWIGG : The best !

MAJOR : Let's hope it'll be the best.

MR. TWIGG : Look ! Mr. Butler's gone over to the Doctor !

MAJOR : They're shaking hands ! Splendid !

DICKIE : They've changed over ! They've put that fast bowler on again.

MAJOR : It's a scandal to let that fellow bowl on this bumpy ground—it's murder. My elbow's aching like blazes—not sure if it hasn't cracked the bone.

MR. TWIGG : The Doctor's got to face it ! Butler's this end. Look out ! Here comes the bowler—doesn't he make awful faces !

[*There is a moment of silence ; the crack of bat and ball—and a cheer.*

MAJOR : Good old Doctor ! Right in the centre of the bat !

MR. TWIGG : Look at that fielder ! It's gone between his legs ! Run ! Run !

MAJOR : Oh, magnificent ! We've tied ! One more to win ! One more !

DICKIE : It's Butler's turn now.

MR. TWIGG : Oh, Butler—do—do make a run !

MAJOR : Here comes the bowler ! What a great hulking brute he is !

[*There is a moment of deep stillness round the Green ; then a crack, and a groan of pain.*

MAJOR : Heavens ! It's got Butler on the knuckles !

DICKIE : He's dropped his bat !

MR. TWIGG : He's doubling up !

MAJOR : God ! It must have hurt him !

[*The first groan of consternation on the Green has turned to a shout of excitement—a roar of applause.*

MR. TWIGG : Look ! Look ! ! The ball's gone through the slips ! It's gone to the boundary ! ! Four ! We've got it !

MAJOR : We've won !

[*All words are drowned in the hubbub from the Green ; people are running towards the pitch.*

By gad ! What a fine game the Doctor's played ! Let's go and chair the old boy ; he deserves it !

[*The* MAJOR *runs out among the crowd, followed by* DICKIE *and* MR. TWIGG.

ROGERS *totally disregards the small* BOYS *jumping about in front of him ; turns in triumph to the* SCORER *of the opposing team, and slaps him on the back so vigorously that the pipe shoots out of his mouth.*

MR. ROGERS : Got you this time, Gilbert !

[*He jumps up and follows the crowd. His small companion picks up his pipe and, relighting it, strolls out with a look of pitying contempt for such foolish excitement.*

The confused turmoil goes on outside. MR. BUTLER *appears, sucking his knuckles and shaking them ; he is followed by the* MAJOR *and some of the team, who are slapping him on the back and congratulating him.*

MAJOR : Damn good show ! Made the winning hit with your knuckles ! Never mind, old boy, it was worth it !

[*Confused cheers and excited laughter come from the opposite direction—the* MAJOR *looks and shouts with laughter.*

Here comes the Doctor ! Bravo !

[*The* DOCTOR *appears, chaired on the shoulders of two sturdy* CRICKETERS *and surrounded by a little cheering crowd. The* MAJOR *runs and helps to lower the* DOCTOR *to the ground. The* DOCTOR *crosses quickly to* MR. BUTLER, *takes his hand, and gently examines his injured knuckles.*

DOCTOR : I'm so sorry, Mr. Butler ; it must have hurt you abominably ! Why on earth didn't they give you any gloves ?

MR. BUTLER : That's all right, Doctor.

DOCTOR : You must let me paint them with iodine. I can't tell you how grateful we are. Isn't it fine—to win ?

MR. BUTLER : It's been a great afternoon.

DOCTOR : You bowled splendidly ! You really *must* play again—(*he looks up and smiles*)—and bat with gloves next time !

[*There is a pause. The* DOCTOR *is gently massaging* MR. BUTLER's *injured hand.*

You *do* understand, don't you, what a pity it would be—if anything happened down here—to spoil all this ?

MR. BUTLER : That's all right, Doctor.

[*The* DOCTOR *looks eagerly up at* MR. BUTLER.

DOCTOR : You mean that ?

[MR. BUTLER *nods and smiles. The* DOCTOR *has been massaging his injured knuckles. He gently presses his hand.*

MR. BUTLER : I shan't disturb you. I can build somewhere else.

DOCTOR : I'm very glad.

[*The* MAJOR *has been fussing impatiently round. He comes up to* MR. BUTLER *and slaps him on the shoulder.*

MAJOR : Come along, Butler. We'll soon put you right at the Blue Boar !

MR. BUTLER : May I stand the drinks ?

MAJOR : By Jove, you're a sportsman !

[*There are some calls for "Speech" outside. The* MAJOR *goes to the entrance and addresses the crowd.*

Boys ! The Doctor's played the game of his life to-day ! He's won the match with his pluck ! I can't say any more, but three cheers for the President !

[*Three ragged cheers burst out. The* DOCTOR *acknowledges them with a little wave of his hand.*

The MAJOR *adds :*

And now Mr. Butler wants to stand drinks all round !

[MR. BUTLER *is carried out on the crest of further cheers.*

The MAJOR *turns, laughing, to the* DOCTOR, *who has sank down upon a little wooden bench. The* MAJOR *crosses to him and begins to unstrap his pads.*

MAJOR : What a great day it's been ! (*He sighs.*) If only it wasn't for this damned Butler business.

DOCTOR (*smiling*) : You needn't worry about that, Major——

MAJOR : Why, how d'you mean ?

DOCTOR : I've settled that. Mr. Butler's not going to disturb us here—he's going to build somewhere else.

MAJOR : You don't mean it !

[*The* DOCTOR *nods and smiles.*

By Gad, that's fine ! How did you do it ?

DOCTOR (*smiles artfully*) : Ah !

MAJOR : Come along, let's go down to the Blue Boar and celebrate !

DOCTOR : I think I'll rest here for a little while —you go on——

MAJOR : No. I'll stay with you !

DOCTOR : No. You must. It's your duty to go.

MAJOR : You deserve a rest, old boy. We've done big things to-day.

[*The* MAJOR *goes away. The crowd has disappeared ; their voices are growing faint across the Green.*

The small SCORING-BOY *comes in with the pile of numbers. He puts them on the table and turns, surprised to see the* DOCTOR *sitting there alone.*

THE BOY : I've put all the numbers together, sir. I'm sorry about that one I left behind last week.

DOCTOR : That's all right, George.

[*The* BOY *lingers at the door for a moment.*

THE BOY : We got 'em beat this time, sir !

DOCTOR : Yes, we managed it this time.

[*There is another little pause.*

THE BOY : Good night, sir.

DOCTOR : Good night, George.

[*The* BOY *goes away. The* DOCTOR *is alone. It is very quiet now ; the sun is beginning to throw long shadows across the Green.*

THE PLAY ENDS

DOWN OUR STREET

CHARACTERS

(In the order of appearance)

CARLO (an Italian Café Keeper)

ROSE MARTIN

TESSIE BERNSTEIN

FRED ANNING

MAGGIE ANNING (his wife)

GINGER

SAM

DET.-SGT. BROWN

TRAM-CONDUCTOR

CHARLIE STUBBS

BELLE COLLINS

PIETRO

ANNIE COLLINS

POLICEMAN

BILL COLLINS

SCENES

An Italian Café in the East End (night)

A Barber's Shop (next morning)

A Room behind the former (about a fortnight later : evening)

ERNEST GEORGE

DOWN OUR STREET

A PLAY

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October 20, 1929.
Producer : Milton Rosmer

To
H. F. RUBINSTEIN
Thanks

ACT I

An Italian café in a district of the East End.

TIME : *From nearing ten o'clock onwards of a night in late summer or early autumn.*

SCENE : *The café is situated on the corner of a main thoroughfare and an ordinary street, with its entrance giving upon the latter. As far as can be arranged, its situation may be pointed by noises of traffic off, and glimpses of pedestrians passing the door every once in a while.*

Upstage right is the entrance to the place ; and the wall runs diagonally to left, being hung with large framed mirrors, with labels of commodities, such as " Ices," " Bovril," " Oxo," etc., pasted on the glass. The same description might well be applied to right wall, but that it is straight and shorter. The floor space is taken up with marble-topped tables and chairs. From a few feet to left of entrance, for two-thirds of the way downstage, is the counter, with a flap and door downstage, where it is rounded off to connect with left wall. Upstage, diagonally, is the frosted glass backing of the shop window, with the blurred shadows of bottles of sweets in rows. Down farther, attached to left wall, is a large fixture with bottled sweets, tobacco, cigarettes, etc., and, handy to use, cups hanging from hooks. Downstage of fixture is an opening giving on the " shop parlour."

On counter is a large urn over a gas-ring ; piles of plates and saucers ; scales ; a show-case of cakes and chocolates, etc. The whole place is garish in appearance, and lighted by electricity.

At rise of curtain, CARLO, *the proprietor of the place, is issuing from behind counter carrying two cups of tea and two plates, with a cake on each, and crosses to where* TESSIE BERNSTEIN *and* ROSE MARTIN *sit at a table downstage right. He is an Italian of about forty-five, rather stout, flabby-faced, and greasy, and is in his shirt-sleeves, with an apron, that may have been white once on a time, but is now stained and dingy.*

ROSE MARTIN, *a woman of nearly thirty, is dowdily clad, a cheap fur being the most prized and petted of her adornments. Even on a fairly warm evening she cannot forgo the glory of wearing it.* TESSIE BERNSTEIN *is a Jewess about five years younger than* ROSE. *Her garments are of better cut and material, and more colourful. Both are rather heavily "made up," and are obviously keen to be taken for younger than they are.*

The table one up to the left of the one occupied by TESSIE *and* ROSE *is taken by a middle-aged man of the labouring type,* FRED ANNING, *who sits deep in an evening paper, and his wife,* MAGGIE, *a medium-built woman of thirty-five, with sharp features and a rather lugubrious manner. She is nondescriptly attired in her poor "best." Beside them a chair heaped with brown paper parcels. Other tables may be occupied or not, according to what is judged best by the producer. The same applies to whether customers come in and go out during the progress of the act.*

CARLO (*setting tea and cakes on table before* ROSE *and* TESSIE) : Ees a verra bad affair, ees ! (*Stands back from table a little.*) They breaka da winda, grabba da rings—maka da bunk ! (*They laugh.*)

ROSE (*derisive*) : 'Ark at 'er !

CARLO (*seriously*) : Ess ! Alla one time—so queek. (*Business-like*) Eightapence, please. (*He is paid, and goes behind counter.*)

FRED (*to* MAGGIE) : S'pose they got someone in line[1] f'r bustin' the jeweller's in 'Igh Street ?

MAGGIE (*preoccupied*) : Don't see 'ow they c'n think who it could've been.

FRED (*wrestling with newspaper*) : *You* don't s'pose . . .

MAGGIE (*emphatic*) : No !

FRED : 'Ave a bit of sense.

[1] In view

MAGGIE (*resentful*) : 'Ave you got sich a lot you c'n afford to orffer me some ?

FRED : All right, 'appy.

ROSE (*to* TESSIE) : Did yer go ?

TESSIE : Did I go with ! Of course I went with.

ROSE : Some of yer seem t' strike lucky.

TESSIE : So lucky I am !

[SAM *and* GINGER *have entered from street. The latter is fresh-complexioned, has reddish hair, and is roughly attired.* SAM *is a shortish, cocksure man of thirty to thirty-five, a few years his companion's junior. He is flashily dressed, his suit being of rather extravagant cut and colour, brown boots, and a soft felt hat worn at a rakish angle. From his manner of holding himself and glancing at his reflection at every opportunity, it is obvious that he takes great interest in his appearance. The pair go to table L.C., at which* GINGER *sits.*

GINGER (*grumbling*) : Jest gittin' comf'table an' interested like an' it's " Time, gentlemen, please." Call it a free country, do they ? What I c'n see of it, my blinkin' rabbits 'ave a better time of it than I does.

SAM (*nodding at* ROSE *and* TESSIE : *to* GINGER) : What're yer goin' . . .

GINGER : Closin' the 'ouses at ten ! It's a lot of blasted rot, if you ask me !

SAM (*impatient*) : I ain't. What're yer goin' t' 'ave ?

GINGER : Gover'ment wants money, don't it ? Well, who pays more t'wards the rotten revenue than the workin' man ?

SAM : Ain't it bad ernough to 'ave a Gover'ment without shoutin' the odds about it ?

GINGER (*punching his palm*) : Through 'e's beer an' 'bacca. Yut they goes all on closin' the 'ouses at ten. What chance do it give a feller ?

SAM : Yer don't think you c'n come in a man's shop an' use 'e's seat up without buyin' nothink, do yer ? Cup of tea ?

GINGER (*disgusted*) : One rotgut's as good as another, I s'pose. (*As* SAM *goes to counter*) Git the dominoes ; I'll give yer a game f'r a pound.

[CARLO *serves* SAM *with tea and hands him a tin box of dominoes, and the latter then goes back to* GINGER.

TESSIE (*to* ROSE) : You should be jealous of me !

ROSE : Jealous of you ! Don't make me laugh ! I only wish I could pick up with some young feller f'r reg'lar.

TESSIE : An' you think it's f'r reg'lar I'm goin' with 'im ?

ROSE : You might do worse. I wouldn't mind the chance. It's all right goin' with this one an' that—I don't say you can't git good times that way—but what I mean is, where's it lead ?

TESSIE : 'Ow comes you talkin' this way ? Ain't been sleepin' with a parson, 'ave yer ?

ROSE : Kid yerself *you* don't know what I mean !

TESSIE : I should know ! Charlie ain't sich a bad feller. I ain't so gorn on 'im, that's all.

ROSE (*ironical*) : Oh, no.

TESSIE : By *my* life !

ROSE : S'pose yer'll say '*e* ain't so gorn on you ? (TESSIE *shrugs her shoulder.*) A feller don't give a gel a night up West every now an' ag'in, spendin' money like dirt an' that there, all f'r nothink.

TESSIE : Did I say 'e was diff'rent from any other feller that way ?

ROSE (*with a laugh*) : You don't 'ave to.

TESSIE : I should chuck myself away on a boy an' 'im goin' inside every now an' ag'in.

ROSE : It wouldn't surprise me to 'ear the police 'ad got 'im in line over last night's affair.

TESSIE : So directly I 'eard 'ow the jeweller's was busted . . .

ROSE (*attentive*) : Yerce, yerce ?

TESSIE : 'Twasn't till this mornin' I 'eard. (ROSE *nods.*) I rushed me breakfast down an' went round 'e's place. (ROSE *looks puzzled.*) An' told 'im t' go over t' the police station straight away. T' say 'ow it could've been no affair of 'e's as he was out with me the time the job come orf.

ROSE (*tritely*) : You never done that along of 'atin' 'im.

TESSIE (*biting her lips*) : Don't *you* care. (*Pause.*)

ROSE : Who'd 'e see over there ?

TESSIE : The detective-sergeant, old Brown. We both see 'im.

ROSE (*surprised*) : You went an' all ?

TESSIE : Of course I went with ! Could yer expect 'em to' take only 'e's word ?

ROSE : An' then yer say you ain't gorn on 'em ! Oh, no ; you ain't some'ow. Only down one side.

TESSIE (*annoyed*) : You know !

FRED (*to* MAGGIE, *folding newspaper*) : Chose the right bloomin' moment an' all !

MAGGIE (*breaking from a reverie*) : What ?

FRED : What d'yer mean, what ?

MAGGIE : Keep yer 'air on, old man. There's *no* law ag'in me sayin' what, I s'pose ?

FRED (*sharply*) : You don't want nothink else ?

MAGGIE : Are you askin' me or jest sayin' I don't ?

FRED (*rising*) : Aw, come on ; let's git along 'ome. (*Turns away.*)

MAGGIE (*rising*) : Fred !

FRED (returning) : What's the matter now ?

MAGGIE (*indicating parcels*) : Ain't yer goin' to carry nothink ?

FRED (*snatching up the one most convenient to carry*) : Aw, give us 'old of that suit. (*Places it under his arm and his hands in his trousers pockets and stands watching* MAGGIE *struggling to possess herself of the remainder, an amused look on his face.*)

MAGGIE (*as they turn towards door*) : It wouldn't 've 'urt yer to 'ave carried . . .

FRED (*loudly*) : I paid f'r 'em. Ain't that ernough f'r yer ? You're never satisfied.

CARLO (*calling to them*) : Goo' nigh', meesees ; goo' nigh', sir ; thanka you verra much.

FRED *and* MAGGIE : Good night, Carlo.

FRED (*to* MAGGIE) : Cost me a nice old bit, this lot 'as. Good job yer don't 'ave a-naunt die every day.

MAGGIE : Out of respect yer must go decent.

[*Exit* FRED *and* MAGGIE *into street.*

GINGER (*arresting* SAM'S *hand as he is about to lay a piece*) : 'Arf a mo' ! You ain't playin' on yer own, yer know.

SAM : Did I play last ?

GINGER : Did yer ! (*Plays piece*). Now you c'n go.

TESSIE (*to* ROSE) : So did I say Charlie Stubbs is a bad feller, did I ? Nobody should be gladder than I would be to see 'im go straight, believe me.

ROSE (*producing packet of cigarettes from her bag*) : 'Ave a gasper ?

TESSIE (*accepting*) : Ta. (*They light up and smoke.*) I *don't* say I don't like the feller . . .

ROSE (*with a short laugh*) : Yer don't 'ave to.

CARLO (*calling to* SAM *and* GINGER) : Plenta much you fella play da domino, no plenta much you spend !

SAM (*to* GINGER, *after looking round*) : Do 'e mean us ? (*To* CARLO, *who nods*) Us ? Aw, give us some more of yer belly-wash, then. (*Resumes game.*)

[*A tall, stoutish man of forty-five, wearing a blue serge suit and a bowler hat, and carrying a rolled umbrella, enters from street. As he moves swiftly to counter his eyes range over those sitting at the various tables.* SAM, *on noticing the newcomer, gives* GINGER *a prodigious wink, and that worthy replies with a wry grimace.* TESSIE *returns a weak smile to the curt nod of recognition the man bestows on her.* CARLO *grins expansively and deferentially at the sight of him.*

CARLO (*filling two cups from tea-pot*) : Howa you go, Messa Brown ? Good, ess ?

BROWN (*brusquely*) : Evenin', Carlo. You're not as busy as usual ?

CARLO : Thursda him always qui-et. No so much qui'et all da otha day, no so much, onaly Thursda.

BROWN (*selecting a cigar from his leather case*) : Early closin' makes a diff'rence, I s'pose ? (CARLO *obsequiously offers lighted match.*) Gives some of them a chance to get farther afield. Thanks.

CARLO : Ees so. (*Calling to* SAM) You fella, Sam, tea you orda. You lika taka som'thin', Meesa Brown, sir ? (BROWN *shakes his head vigorously.*) You no lika da tea. (*Laughing*) Wheeskey you onaly lika, ess ?

BROWN : Tea's all right. Once a day's enough.

SAM (*rising, to* GINGER) : Mind, I know what I've got, Ginger !

GINGER (*grinning*) : No, do yer ? Tell us ! (SAM *moves to counter.*)

BROWN : Hallo, Sam !

SAM (*eyeing his reflection in urn*) : Whatto, guv ! (*Slings coin on counter.*) Somebody been givin' yer summink t' do, ain't they ?

BROWN (*smiling*) : We don't mind. It's nice to have somethink to think about once in a while, yer know. *You* might keep that in mind, in case you feel disposed to give us a job once the flat's[1] over.

SAM (*accepting change from* CARLO *and winking at* BROWN) : 'Elp any deservin' case, that's me !

BROWN (*with a laugh*) : But you seldom hear of one more deservin' than yerself !

SAM (*grinning*) : Well, I mean . . . charity begins at 'ome, yer know, guv. It needn't end there, though !

BROWN (*making a pass at him with his umbrella*) : You'll do. (*Quietly*) I heard Mainstay for to-morrow. D'yer know anythink ?

SAM : Leave it alone, guv. (*Drags a paper from his pocket.*) There's a filly goin' in the same race'll be 'ome, rubbed down, an' 'ad 'er you-an'-me[2] before 'e gits 'e's peepers[3] on the post. (*Looking at paper*) What's its Gord-f'rsaken name ? Bloo-me, the blokes what christen race-'orses ought t' 'ave a lifer makin' bettin' slips out. That 'ud learn 'em. 'Ere y'are, guv !

BROWN (*taking paper and reading*) : Oh, Eurydice ! (*pronounces "dice."*) (*Handing paper back.*) Got a chance, d'yer think ?

SAM (*returning paper to his pocket*) : Chance ! Think nothink ; I know. It's a stone-ginger-cert. (*Taking up cups of tea*) 'Ave a bit on. (*Turning away*) Not with my bloke, though. I'll see yer later f'r me com.[4] (*Returns to* GINGER.)

CARLO (*very confidential, to* BROWN) : Meesa

[1] Flat-racing. [2] Tea. [3] Eyes. [4] Commission.

Brown, don' you taka no notees for what ees fella tella you. Thirta twenta time him giva Carlo winna for da race ; twenta thirta time Carlo him losa da money, nearly, ess ! Onaly him don' taka da notees for da big liar Sam.

BROWN (*laughing*) : You mean you don't have a bet ?

CARLO : Me no bet once ! Befor' me want for bet verra much som'time. No' now. Work ees onaly way maka da money sure, ess !

BROWN : Make a nice little pile and then off to Italy, eh ? I know !

CARLO : My father him write for Carlo ; " Com' hom' I*tally* soon," him say. Him no mo' young, no much good for look after lan'.

BROWN : You're not leaving us ?

CARLO : Verra queek me leava soon. In I*tally* my old man him die, ess. (*Beaming*) Carlo own plenta prop-ahty, be verra gran' fella ; ess ?

BROWN : You *don't* want yer father to die ?

CARLO (*sadly*) : Ah-no. (*Beaming*) Him die alla da sam', ees so. (BROWN *turns from counter with a laugh.*)

BROWN (*to* TESSIE) : You're not out on the razzle with Charlie to-night, Tessie ?

TESSIE (*resentful*) : Me ? 'Ow comes me out on the *razzle* with anybody ? (*He smiles.*) When you should see me losin' me decency that way, I would like for you to pinch me.

BROWN (*with an easy laugh*) : I'll keep it in mind. (*Serious*) Have you seen him to-night ?

TESSIE (*suspicious*) : D'you want 'im ?

BROWN : No—no.

TESSIE (*slight leer*) : For why d'yer ask if I've seen 'im ? *You* don't know he's playin' billiards with a feller at the club !

BROWN (*prodding floor with umbrella, looking at her from under his brows*) : I was told he was seen goin' in the pictures with a girl. That's why I was surprised to find you here. (*Turning away to counter*) Somebody like him, p'r'aps.

TESSIE (*to the smiling* ROSE) : So mustn't 'e go t' the pictures if 'e wants to ?

ROSE : *I* ain't sayin' 'e mustn't.

TESSIE (*rather defiantly*) : It wasn't 'im. It couldn't 've been.

[BROWN *is seen to say good-bye to* CARLO, *nod to the girls and* SAM, *and exit into street.*

GINGER (*blowing*) : I'm glad that bogie's[1] gorn. Puts me orf me game. (SAM *laughs.*)

TESSIE (*to* ROSE) : You take notice of what a split tries t' make out !

ROSE : Don't be sich a date, f'r Gord's sake.

TESSIE : Sich a lot *you* know ! I only wish you should 'ave a feller so struck on you as Charlie is on me.

[*A L.C.C. tram-conductor runs in from street with billy-can.*

CONDUCTOR (*to* CARLO) : 'Ere y'are, Carlo, keverleerio rushdacanno. Back in arf-a-n'ouro ! Compree ? (*Runs out to street.*)

CARLO : Ees, fella ! (*Throws can to floor.*) Alla sam' joka him say evra blooma time. (*Picks up can.*) No much sugar him get, you see !

[*General laughter.*

ROSE (*to* TESSIE) : Any'ow, you don't 'ave t' try an' kid me yer wouldn't mind if 'e 'ad 've gorn t' the pictures with another pusher.[2]

TESSIE (*shrugging a shoulder*) : For my part !

[*Two young people have entered from street, on seeing whom* ROSE'S *eyes widen. One is a clean-looking young man of twenty-two, not too flash in*

[1] Detective. [2] Girl.

dress but rather jaunty in manner ; the other is a piquantly pretty girl of eighteen to nineteen, with a trim figure, who is obviously attired in her " best." Her clothes are fairly fashionable as to cut, but the quality of the materials involved in them may leave a good deal to be desired. That she is aware of her charms, not least of which is her youthful grace of movement, and has done her best to appear alluring, is very evident ; and, but for her extravagant use of lip-stick, her appearance does not offend fairly good taste. She is BELLE COLLINS. *The young man is* CHARLIE STUBBS. *As they pass* SAM *he scowls at them ; and during the ensuing dialogue he frequently glances apprehensively in their direction. They go to a table near counter.*

ROSE (*to* TESSIE, *with a laugh*) : It looks like 'e was so gorn on you.

TESSIE (*who has not yet noticed* CHARLIE) : You should worry yerself !

CHARLIE (*to* BELLE) : What'll you 'ave ?

TESSIE (*chagrined*) : My . . . (*Bites her lips.*)

BELLE (*smiling up at* CHARLIE) : I don't know . . . Ice, p'r'aps ; eh ?

TESSIE (*with a toss of her head*) : I should care !

CHARLIE (*bending down to* BELLE) : You don't arf look good.

BELLE (*saucily*) : Go on ! Tellin' us things, ain't yer ?

CHARLIE (*soberly*) : No kid. Yer look good ernough to eat ; straight away.

BELLE : I don't want t' be. (*Giving him a gentle push*) Everybody's looking at us !

[CHARLIE *turns, sees* TESSIE, *and looks embarrassed.*

CHARLIE (*to* TESSIE) : What yer, Tess ! (*Approaches her.*) I was lookin' f'r you before.

TESSIE (*sarcastic*) : Go on ! Yer do surprise me !

CHARLIE (*casually*) : Yerce. Feller I was s'posed t' play billiards with didn't show up. Thought p'r'aps you'd come t' the pictures or summink. (*To* ROSE) What yer, Rose !

ROSE (*to* CHARLIE) : Good up there this week ?

CHARLIE (*not very enthusiastic*) : Not so dusty. Big picture's one of them 'ot American society films ; shootin', 'uggin', an' kissin' all over the place, an' a weddin' with a ton of brides an' bridegrooms. Goin' t' 'ave summink ?

ROSE : I don't mind. Tea an' cake.

CHARLIE : What about you, Tess ?

TESSIE (*sneering*) : So since when've you took t' kidnappin' ?

CHARLIE : Young Belle ? 'Old it up ; she's gorn eighteen.

TESSIE (*sulkily*) : I don't want nothink.

CHARLIE (*concerned*) : What's got *you* ?

TESSIE (*quickly*) : You ain't ; so yer needn't think it.

[*He turns away to counter.*

BELLE (*smiling across at them*) : 'Allo, Tess ! Evenin', Rose.

[ROSE *smiles good-naturedly.*

TESSIE (*calls to* BELLE) : I s'pose yer think 'ow smart *you* are !

BELLE (*a little taken aback*) : I don't git yer.

TESSIE : *You* don't git me ! A gel the age of you should be in bed this time of night altogether.

BELLE (*spirited*) : From the way you speak I s'pose you're old ernough t' be me mother ?

[CHARLIE *smiles his approbation.*

ROSE (*to* TESSIE) : You asked f'r it, yer know.

TESSIE (*annoyed*) : Go over an' make a fuss of 'er, why don't yer !

ROSE : If I thought I would, I would, so there ! (*To* CHARLIE, *who brings tea and cake for her*) Ta, Charlie.

CHARLIE (*to* TESSIE) : You ain't jealous, are yer ?

TESSIE : Do *I* know what you're talkin' about !

CHARLIE : What've yer got to be bad friends with Belle over ?

TESSIE (*guffawing*) : Bad friends with 'er ! If you wasn't with 'er nobody would notice 'er at all.

CHARLIE : I wouldn't bank on that if I was you.

TESSIE : 'Ow I wish some fellers shouldn't git sich a-nidea of themselves that once a gel's looked at them she's blind to everythink else in trousers.

CHARLIE (*supercilious*) : Aw, p'r'aps it 'ud be as well if some gels done the same. (*Turns away to counter.*)

TESSIE : D'you think I would allow *my*self t' think twice about you ? (*He turns.*) Once would give me a sick 'eadache altogether.

CHARLIE (*sarcastic*) : Aw, feelin' bilious, eh ? I *am* sorry.

TESSIE : You should go in f'r the teachin' profession, so fond of kids you are !

CHARLIE (*as he again turns to counter*) : Shrr-up. People'll think we're married. (CARLO *serves him, and he returns to* BELLE.

ROSE (*to* TESSIE) : Why don't *you* go careful ?

TESSIE (*incensed*) : Am *I* afraid of 'im ? It would take more than the likes of 'im t' put the breeze up Tessie Bernstein, believe me !

CHARLIE (*shouting across*) : Aw, go to . . . (*Suddenly changes his mind and comes across.*) S'pose *you* ain't got the idea because I was out with

you a couple of times I mustn't look at nobody else ? Oh, no !

TESSIE : Was I out with you a couple of times, was I ? 'Ow *nice* it must've been for me !

BELLE (*to* CHARLIE) : Are yer with me or are yer with them ?

TESSIE (*jerking her head at* BELLE) : You'd better do that, keep the child quiet.

BELLE (*rising*) : A woman of *your age* t' be rowin' over a boy in public !

TESSIE (*jumping to her feet*) : Of my age ! Yer saucy . . .

BELLE : If 'e wants t' go with yer, let 'im !

TESSIE (*throwing off* ROSE's *restraining hand*) : Go with me ! Of course, go with me ! Because yer think you've 'ad all you're likely t' git out of 'im.

BELLE : It cuts me t' the 'eart t' make you out wrong, dearie, but we ain't all like you.

CHARLIE (*to* TESSIE, *threatening*) : What you want's a wipe across the kisser. You're goin' the right way t' get it an' all.

[CARLO, *who has been showing signs of his increasing apprehension, now issues from behind counter and places his bulk between the contending parties.*

CARLO (*to* TESSIE) : You no mus' maka for row in ees place ! You maka for row you no stoppa here som' mor'. You no ondrastan' ? (*Turns to* CHARLIE *and is seen inducing him to go back to* BELLE.)

ROSE (*to* TESSIE) : I wonder you ain't got better sense ; I do, really.

TESSIE (*slowly sitting*) : Must they say what they like about me, an' I must say nothink ?

ROSE : The feller was all right ernough till you started with 'im.

TESSIE : Don't *you* care !

[CHARLIE *has rejoined* BELLE *; and* CARLO *has returned to his place behind counter.* TESSIE *from her table, and* SAM *from his, are noticed to evince a good deal of interest in the sight of the two young people in conversation over their ices.*

SAM (*settling himself to the game*) : I thought you'd played the double six !

GINGER (*gathering in pieces*) : So I 'ave. It's 'ere, ain't it ?

Sam : Before, I mean.

GINGER : Yer don't think I'm tryin' t' duck-shove[1] yer ?

SAM (*coolly*) : It wouldn't surprise me.

GINGER (*do.*) : That's awright, then. You ought t' pay more attention t' the game.

ROSE (*to* TESSIE) : Well, let's go for a stroll.

TESSIE (*intent on* CHARLIE *and* BELLE) : For why ?

ROSE : Ain't *you* tired of settin' ?

[*Pause.*

TESSIE (*of* BELLE) : Sich a wonder it is 'er mother allows 'er in 'ere.

ROSE : We're 'ere, ain't we ?

TESSIE : The time of night it is ! A gel of 'er age !

ROSE (*impatient*) : Aw, give it a rest. I thought yer said yer wasn't gorn on 'im ?

TESSIE (*involuntarily*) : After all 'e said !

ROSE : Gor bly, ain't you used t' bein' told the tale by now ?

[TESSIE *sits and sulks.*

BELLE (*to* CHARLIE) : Don't yer feel . . . you know, cheap-like, after seein' pictures like the big 'un we see to-night ?

CHARLIE (*neglectful of his ice, having eyes only for her*) : Aw, I don't know. Why ?

[1] Cheat.

BELLE : I do. That coat she wore in the last bit—not the weddin'—the fur one ; you know ! I lay summink went t' the payin' f'r that.

CHARLIE : That there bit on the beach ! Foradora, or somewhere. Crimes, I says t' meself, she ain't arf got a pair of Scotch pegs[1] !

BELLE (*archly*) : You ain't nice t' know. (*He looks serious.*) Mustn't it be all right t' wear sich grand clo'es ? Even if it is only f'r an 'our or two a day. That's if you can't 'ave 'em f'r yer own. An' that house she lived in ! Palace, I call it ! An' after seein' all that yer come out into the mouldy 'Igh Street an' go 'ome. Life do seem cheap after the pictures.

CHARLIE (*sympathetic*) : I'd like t' see you in a fur smother[1] the like she wore.

BELLE (*entranced*) : You would ? (*He nods.*) Really ? (*He nods more strenuously.*) Wouldn't I ? Do make yer wild when yer see pretty clo'es an' yer know all the time you can't 'ave 'em.

CHARLIE : Say you don't know ! Still, it ain't all twenty-two carat yer see on the pictures. I mean, things might look good an' be . . . well, not so bad, see ?

BELLE (*warmly*) : All the time, I *did* enjoy it.

CHARLIE (*with a laugh*) : To 'ear yer anyone 'ud think you'd never been before.

BELLE : Me ? I've been to three picture-shows in a week before now. And a dance on the Sunday. My mother was t' know she'd about skin me. Pictures once a week is more than ernough, she says. An' she's got a proper down on dancin'. Before I was put orf, that was. We ain't arf slack in our trade.

CHARLIE : Oh, yus.

TESSIE (*to* ROSE, *peeved*) : Where've we got t' go ?

[1] Legs. [2] Coat.

ROSE : Oh, anywhere.

GINGER (*to* SAM) : Ere, I . . . I . . . (*Stops him from playing.*)

SAM (*grinning*) : Ain't a lot misses you, is there ?

GINGER (*playing*) : If there is, you're entitled to 'ave it.

TESSIE (*at* BELLE *laughing at something* CHARLIE *says*) : 'Ow I would laugh if 'e was t' git the silly little swine into trouble !

ROSE : An' if 'e '*ad* t' marry 'er I s'pose you'd die of laughing ? Aw, no ; you ain't a jealous nature !

Tessie (*hotly*) : Listen ; is it any business of yours ? You should worry *your*self !

[ROSE *selects another cigarette, lights up, and smokes, bestowing a pitying smile on* TESSIE *every once in a while.*

BELLE (*to* CHARLIE) : An' what made yer speak t' me to-night ?

CHARLIE : *You* didn't give us the glad,[1] I s'pose ?

BELLE (*roguishly*) : I did.

CHARLIE (*seriously*) : An', any'ow, I've told yer why. In the pictures I told yer.

BELLE (*casually, eyeing him from under her hat-brim*) : I expect I was *that* interested I didn't pay much attention.

CHARLIE (*resentful*) : Yer soon took the spike[2] when I tried t' put me arm round yer.

BELLE : I've 'eard about your sort before.

CHARLIE : I didn't mean you no harm.

BELLE (*innocently*) : No more did I you when I said I couldn't set comf'table that way.

ROSE (*to* TESSIE) : Well, what's the sense in us settin' 'ere, an' you eatin' yer 'eart out lookin' at them all the time ?

[1] Glad-eye. [2] Resentment.

TESSIE (*turning her head away*) : Do *I* know what yer mean ?

ROSE (*sharply*) : I'm sorry I spoke !

TESSIE : Yer notice things, don't yer ? Listen ; so clever you are it's a wonder yer brains don't set yer 'air alight.

ROSE : When you're the way you are to-night, it's dam' 'ard to keep friends with yer, so it is.

TESSIE : For my part ! Do *I* want yer for a friend ?

ROSE : There's been times you was glad—plenty.

TESSIE : If yer didn't want t' be friends with me, so would yer 'ave been ? 'Ow you flatter yerself ! You would go out of yer way t' be somethink yer didn't want !

ROSE (*rising in dudgeon*) : You know.

TESSIE (*bitterly*) : Sich a real friend you are ! The way yer git upset when yer see the way I am !

ROSE (*sitting*) : 'Ave a bit of blasted gumption, do. What's Charlie more than the next feller ?

TESSIE : Don't *I* know 'e ain't no diff'rent ?

ROSE : Then why worry yer 'ead about 'im ? There's as good fish in the sea as there is come out of it.

TESSIE : A lot I care what's in the sea ! It would serve 'im out if 'e was at the bottom of it.

ROSE (*laughing quietly*) : Yer don't wish 'em no 'arm, do yer ?

TESSIE : The 'arm I wish 'im's so as 'e shouldn't 'ave no legs neither.

[*Rose smiles and talks to her.*

BELLE (*her eyes wide*) : My, you ain't been a bad lot in yer time, 'ave yer ? My mother knew I was out with you, she'd 'ave a fit.

CHARLIE (*in explanation*) : The first time I got wiped up[1] wasn't my fault. Not prop'ly. (*He speaks very earnestly.*) A little mob of us was sky-larkin', and, before I tumbled[2] to it, one of us—not me—'ad knocked off[3] a case from a car—two-seater, it was—standin' in the gutter jest by where we was larkin'. Before I'd rumbled[4] what I was doin' I was 'elpin' t' git it away. Laughin' like 'ello, I was, an' all. All of a sudden, out jumps a feller from nowhere an' claims me. I was slow. Course, not twiggin' all the rest of the bunch 'ad flapped[5] ; see ? So I ups with me German band[6] and lands 'im one ; an', bein' orf 'e's balance like, I s'pose, 'e goes sprawlin'. " This is where I grease,"[7] I remember sayin' t' meself. I did ; bang into the arms of a bluebottle[8] what come up t' see what the bother was. Got fourteen days f'r that, I did. There was nothink ag'inst me, but I was known to frequent bad comp'ny. That's 'ow they put it in the book of words. So they put me away where there was worser. I was unlucky, that's all.

BELLE (*sympathising*) : An' all f'r a bit of a joke as you may say !

CHARLIE (*eager*) : That's it ! A bit of a joke.

BELLE : I *do* call it a shame.

CHARLIE : After that, it was dead easy ; see ? I'd lost me blinkin' job. Not that I minded *that*. (*Quickly, as she shows antagonism to the sentiment*). The boys was very good, though. They see I 'ad a bob or two in me pocket come the week-ends, an' a few fags. But d' you think I could come across another billet ? One worth me while, I mean. F'r days an' days I mooched about lookin' ; with slops[9] eyein' me over everywhere I went—or *I* thought they was. " What's the good ? " I says at last. " I've done

[1] Locked up.
[2] Understood.
[3] Stolen.
[4] Understood.
[5] Run away.
[6] Hand.
[7] Escape.
[8] Policeman.
[9] Policemen.

fourteen days f'r nuthink, an' it ain't killed me ; awright, next time it'll be f'r summink." After that it was dead easy ; see ?

BELLE : You ought to 'ave done what Ada Weston did when *she* got into trouble : cleared out of the neighbourhood to somewhere yer wasn't known.

CHARLIE (*resentful*) : That's right. I 'adn't got a baby to 'ide. You're not comparin' me with nothink, are yer ?

BELLE : There ain't a lot of differ'nce between you an' 'er ; you both walked into trouble.

CHARLIE : Ain't there !

BELLE : 'Ow many times 'ave yer been inside ?[1]

CHARLIE : Aw, I don't know . . . Three, p'r'aps, or four.

BELLE : I reckon you're a fool.

CHARLIE : What d'yer mean ?

BELLE : Well, yer don't like goin' inside, do yer ?

CHARLIE : I didn't like school, but I 'ad t' go. (*She looks displeased.*) I don't *mind* work, I'll work with the next if I know I'm goin' t' git what I work for.

BELLE : What d'yer do ?

CHARLIE : All sorts. Fiddlin', most.

BELLE : Swindlin' people ; that sort of fiddlin' ?

CHARLIE : Gor bly, yer don't think I go buskin ?[2] Mostly, I buy up anythink goin' cheap I think I c'n make a week's work f'r meself sellin'. What's the 'arm in that ?

BELLE : It all depends 'ow the stuff's got.

CHARLIE : " Hembrace yer opportunities " is my motto. When the right chat[3] comes along

[1] In prison. [2] Street-singing. [3] Goods.

at the right price, it's like biting the mit[1] that feeds yer to go askin' a lot of unnecessary questions. That's 'ow I figure it, any'ow.

BELLE (*firmly*) : You'll 'ave t' figure it diff'rent if you're goin' t' know me.

CHARLIE : I bet if I was t' fiddle you a coat like the tart 'ad on in that picture you'd think diff'rent.

BELLE (*indignant*) : Oh, no, I wouldn't !

CHARLIE : Kid yerself, I bet your little dial 'ud look proper fetchin' comin' out of a big collar the like they've got.

BELLE (*relenting*) : D'you think so ?

CHARLIE : You *don't*, I s'pose ? (*She smiles.*)

BELLE (*breaking with the dream of having such a possession*) : What's the good of talkin' ? Couldn't *you* eat another ice ?

CHARLIE (*awakening to the ruins of the one on his plate*) : I ain't 'ad one yut.

BELLE : That's what I thought.

CHARLIE (*loudly, amused*) : Look at this ! Like nothink on earth !

TESSIE (*for him to overhear*) : 'E says that ! An' all round 'im's mirrors. (*Gives a sarcastic laugh.*)

BELLE (*at* TESSIE) : S'pose you ought to admire 'er f'r seein' f'r 'erself they *are* mirrors.

[CHARLIE *rises with a laugh, and goes to counter.* ROSE (to TESSIE, *who seems intent on going over and having a row with* BELLE) : Don't be sich a date ! What's the good ? She's only a kid . . ." (TESSIE *settles herself again on seeing* SAM *rise and go across to* BELLE.)

BELLE (*surprised*) : 'Allo, Uncle Sam !

SAM (*nodding at* CHARLIE) : You know who you'r with, I s'pose ?

[1] Hand.

BELLE : Cheek ! D'yer think I can't take care of meself ?

SAM (*taking seat vacated by* CHARLIE) : Now, look 'ere . . .

TESSIE (*catching* CHARLIE'S *eye*) : Gonneff ![1]

CHARLIE (*moving swiftly towards her*) : Call me a thief ag'in, yer rotten little yid, yer, an' I'll give yer a welt under the ear.

[CARLO *hurries to them from behind counter.*

TESSIE (louder) : Gonneff ! There !

CHARLIE (*angrily*) : You've asked for it . . .

CARLO (*seizing* CHARLIE'S *arm from behind and slewing him round*) : You don' maka for a fool for yourself !

CHARLIE : Let me go ! (GINGER *comes and speaks to him.*)

TESSIE (*stridently*) : Sich a gran' feller 'e is ! Knockin' gels about is all 'e's fit for.

CHARLIE (*incensed*) : Let me go !

ROSE (*to* TESSIE, *rising*) : I ain't waitin' if you ain't comin'.

CHARLIE (*shouting at* TESSIE *from over* GINGER'S *shoulder*) : You don't mind comin' out an' 'avin' a good time with the gonneff's money, yer. . .

GINGER (*a rough warning*) : Ease up, old mate.

CHARLIE (*to* GINGER) : Any business of yours, is it ?

GINGER : Yer don't want t' git run in, do yer ? Well, then . . . (*Is seen expostulating with* CHARLIE.)

CARLO (*to* TESSIE, *gesticulating*) : You no speaka for row in ees place ; me tella you ! (*Swelling visibly.*) You all da sam' you dam' foreign peoples !

[*General laughter.*

[1] Thief.

TESSIE (*to* CARLO) : For what do you take yourself?

CARLO : Ees no matter for me ! Ees you for matter. You speaka for row, me no wanta you custom.

ROSE (*to* TESSIE) : Aw, come on.

TESSIE (*to* ROSE) : If yer don't like to wait do the other thing. (*To* CARLO) Ain't there no other places, ain't there?

CARLO : Plenta otha places. Plenta much Carlo wan' for you go ees otha places ! (*Finally*) Me don't serve you no mor'. (*Turns away to counter, where he serves* CHARLIE, *talking to him the while.*)

ROSE (*to* TESSIE) : Ain't you comin'?

TESSIE (*glaring defiantly at* CARLO) : I'll come when *I* like.

SAM (*rising from seat as* CHARLIE *approaches*) : Awright, 'ave it yer own way. Only don't say I didn't warn yer.

BELLE (*indignant*) : What 'arm am I doin'? You've got a dam' cheek, I reckon, Uncle Sam. I ain't a kid !

SAM (*to* CHARLIE, *who nods and smiles at him*) : Play the blasted game, old man.

CHARLIE (*setting ices down*) : What's up now?

SAM (*indicating* BELLE) : Play the blasted game.

BELLE (*to* SAM) : What right've you t' come between me an' a feller? Anyone 'ud think you was responsible for me some way, instead of bein' only a-nuncle. I call it mean to come spyin' on a gel when she's out for a little innocent amusement. (TESSIE, *who stands by watching, guffaws at this.* BELLE *turns on her.*) Of course, *you* wouldn't understand what that is, you wouldn't !

TESSIE (*to* ROSE) : 'Ow nice it must be to 'ave yer family lookin' after yer !

[CARLO *hurries to her.*

BELLE : You're only jealous you're too old in the tooth to 'ave any family left to worry over *you* !

CARLO (*seizing* TESSIE'S *arm*) : You go outa ees shop ? You no go outa ees shop, me calla da coppa.

TESSIE (*tearing arm away*) : With only a finger yer touch me, an' I'll summons yer, yer . . . (CARLO *wilts. He is seen reasoning with her aside.*)

BELLE (*to* Sam, *rather tearful*) : Now you've made me look ridiculous, p'r'aps you're satisfied ?

SAM : I spoke t' yer f'r yer own good.

BELLE : Accordin' t' your idea !

SAM : 'Ave it yer own way, then. Only *you* let me tell you this : yer mother ain't agoin' t' die a-laughin' when she 'ears yer been out with this joint. (*Touches* CHARLIE *with index-finger, and that worthy brushes the spot with his hand, grinning facetiously the while.*)

CHARLIE : You've got summink comin' t' *you*, Sam ; an' it ain't nothink you c'n buy summink with.

SAM (*squaring his shoulders*) : Oh ? I'll give yer yer change without keepin' yer waitin'. (*To* BELLE) An' another thing : if you think 'e's the sort as makes innocent enjoyment a 'obby, well, yer better 'ave another think—see ?

BELLE (*sneering*) : Now you're goin' round t' split on me t' mother ?

SAM : Never mind *what* I'm goin' t' do.

CHARLIE (*pushing past him and seating himself*) : Aw, go away an' play.

SAM (*tapping* CHARLIE *on the shoulder*) : If she comes to any 'arm through you, I'll play awright. An' it'll be your face *I'll* 'ave a game with.

CHARLIE (*rising slowly*) : You will ?

SAM : I will !

BELLE (*pulling at* CHARLIE'S *sleeve*) : Take no notice of 'im, Charlie. What I fancy doin' the likes of 'im won't stop me. It's comin' t' summink, I must say, when a gel can't look at a feller an' 'er gorn eighteen an' able t' earn 'er keep.

SAM (*contemptuous*) : What do you know of the world ?

BELLE : I've got t' learn, ain't I ? I'd know less than I do if mother an' the rest of yer ad yer ways.

SAM (*turning away*) : Don't f'rgit, old man ; play the blasted game.

CHARLIE (*sitting*) : Yer've got the words awright ; yer'd better go an' learn the music.

[SAM *returns to* GINGER.

A young Italian has entered from street. He is about twenty years of age, good-looking, with flashing eyes and teeth and curly hair. His suit of cheap blue serge, green soft hat, gaudy socks and tie, and yellow-brown boots are of startling newness. He is rather diffident in manner.

CARLO (*to* TESSIE) : Excuse. (*Hurries to newcomer, his face lighting up in an expensive smile.*) Pietro ! Salute ! (*Takes his hand and draws him to* TESSIE *and* ROSE.)

PIETRO (*a shy smile mantling his face*) : Salute. Come sta ?

CARLO : Bennisimo ; e lei ?

PIETRO (*with obvious concentration*) : Verra . . . well.

[*They laugh.*

CARLO (*to* ROSE *and* TESSIE, *holding* PIETRO'S *arm*) : Naice boy, ess ? Ees nephew for me, ees

one. (PIETRO *laughs shyly*) Naice rosa face lika da ladies like. Plenta strong for work hard.

ROSE (*casually*) : We've seen 'im before.

CARLO (*dropping* PIETRO's *arm and taking* TESSIE's) : You don' taka no notice for what me say befor', ees so ?

ROSE (*moving towards street*) : That's awright, Carlo.

CARLO : Me no can affor' have row ! Ees no good for busaness.

TESSIE : All the same, 'ave you got the right t' say just what *you* like t' me ?

CARLO (*releasing her*) : Me verra sorry. No can help . . .

ROSE (*about to exit to street*) : Good night, Carlo ! Good night, Belle ! Good night, Charlie !

TESSIE (*glaring at* CHARLIE *as she moves towards door*) : D'yer say good night to *that* !

CHARLIE *and* BELLE : Good night, Rose !

[ROSE *and* TESSIE *exit to street.*

SAM (*to* GINGER, *with a glance at* CHARLIE *and* BELLE) : Gor on. 'Tain't late. Jest one more game. (*Shuffles pieces.*)

GINGER : Awright.

[CARLO *and* PIETRO *are behind counter.*

Belle (*to* CHARLIE) : If I liked a feller well ernough, I wouldn't care.

CHARLIE (*tentatively*) : An' you *don't* me ?

BELLE (*smiling roguishly*) : Now you want t' know.

CHARLIE : You ought t' know.

BELLE : I ain't 'ad nothink t' do with yer before to-night !

CHARLIE : I like *you.* Better an' any gel I've been with.

BELLE (*pointedly*) : You needn't tell me all about the others. I ain't like *them*—see ?

CHARLIE (*very earnestly*) : That's why !

BELLE (*warning*) : Because I let yer buy me another ice it don't mean nothink serious, mind !

CHARLIE : D'yer think I'm the kind t' throw it up at yer afterwards ?

BELLE (*after a slight pause*) : P'r'aps I might come out with yer to-morrow night.

CHARLIE (*eager*) : An' Sunday ?

BELLE : Sunday !

CHARLIE : Why not ?

BELLE : What's the matter with Saturday ?

CHARLIE : To-morrow an' Sunday, if yer like ; but I can't Saturday.

BELLE (*suspicious*) : Oh, yer can't Saturday ! It'll 'ave t' be some time next week, then.

CHARLIE (*disappointed*) : Why ? There's to-morrow an' Sunday !

BELLE (*casually*) : I'll see. (*He looks despondent.*) Fridays I generally 'ave a bath. An' where can yer go Sundays ?

CHARLIE (*gloomily*) : Somewhere.

BELLE : Besides, my mother can't abear seein' people enjoy themselves on Sundays.

[*Pause.*

CHARLIE : You ain't goin' t' let what Sam said make a diff'rence ?

BELLE : 'Im ! A bookmaker's tout ! No straighter than a butcher's 'ook 'isself ! Still, if I do git comin' with you much . . . (*his face clears*) . . . I don't say I'm goin' to, mind ! . . . *You'll* 'ave to try an' keep clear of trouble. A gel can't be too careful.

CHARLIE : That's my game, keepin' clear of trouble.

BELLE (*sweetly*) : Oh ? You ain't been much of a success at it up t' now. (*Laughs at his obvious discomfiture.*)

[*Tram-conductor runs in from street and up to counter.*

CONDUCTOR : Come on, Carlo ! Let's 'ave yer !

CARLO (*hurriedly issuing from room behind counter*) : Da tea ! Me forget him ! (*Busies himself with making billy-can of tea.*)

[PIETRO *appears in doorway of room.*

CONDUCTOR : Call yerself a caff ! This comes of me givin' up the jollay old Ritz. My friend, the Prince, told me I'd be let down some night. An' I got royalty up on the car, an' all ! 'Urry up. We got a reputation t' study. If we're late, some old geezer's bound t' write t' the *Daily Mail* about it. Then our people'll 'ave another sub orf the rates t' git their own back. Come on, yer comic-opera son of a sago pudd'n'.

CARLO (*helplessly*) : Ees talk ! Me no can hurry.

CONDUCTOR (*to* PIETRO *and* BELLE *and* CHARLIE, *who are intent on him*) : Ain't 'e a lad ? Ought t' 'ave been a commercial traveller to a hundertaker. You know ; top 'at with widow's weeps at the back, an umberella, about six months gorn, an' a pocketful of shavin's, so as people could dekko[1] the fine range 'e'd got in wooden overcoats.

[*General laughter.*

CARLO (*pushing can of tea at him*) : Da tea.

CONDUCTOR (*reaching for it*) : This with you ?

CARLO (*retaining his hold on can*) : You no pay . . .

[1] See.

[CONDUCTOR *throws coppers on counter and snatches up can.*

CONDUCTOR : Ain't 'e 'ard ? I reckon 'e could set all day at Lord's without 'urting 'e's feelin's. (*Runs towards door.*) Good night ! (*Exits to street.*)

SAM (*to* GINGER) : Proper blasted comedian, that bloke. Awright, we'll pack up now. That's too ogg[1] you owe me.

GINGER : Who says ? You owe me, yer mean.

SAM (*casually*) : Well, same thing, only the other way round.

GINGER : Only it means more t' me that way ; see ?

BELLE (*to* CHARLIE) : What, this time of night !

CHARLIE (*ardent*) : Why not ? (*She looks straight at him.*) What're you afraid of ?

BELLE (*repudiating this*) : I ain't afraid. I don't want t' go, that's all.

CHARLIE (*pleading*) : Aw, be a sport.

BELLE (*with a laugh*) : Lot of sport in settin' on a seat in the churchyard in the dark, I must say !

CHARLIE (*superiorly*) : Say you don't know !

BELLE (*ironical*) : Oh, 'ave *you* made a 'abit of it ? (*He writhes.*) I like yer best where I c'n see yer.

CHARLIE : You ain't a bit matey. Not even a kiss I ain't 'ad.

BELLE (*simulating indignation*) : Cooo, cheek !

SAM (*coming to counter*) : 'Ere y'are, Carlo. Ginger's takin' 'ome the double-six t' sleep with. 'E's 'ad it so frequent 'e's got attached to it like.

CARLO : You pincha da domino . . .

[1] Two shillings.

SAM (*turning away*) : Only for fun, yer date. (*To* BELLE) What about it, Belle ?

BELLE (*annoyed at the interruption*) : What about what ?

SAM : Won't yer mother be wonderin' what's become of yer if yer not 'ome soon ?

BELLE : You don't 'ave t' git all 'ot an' bothered over it, any'ow. I c'n see meself 'ome, thank yer. (*Looking at Charlie*) Close the door.

SAM (*moistening his lips with his tongue*) : You ain't comin', then ?

BELLE (*looking up at him*) : What, are you still 'ere ?

CHARLIE (*to* SAM) : You 'eard what the gel said.

SAM (*to* CHARLIE) : I was talkin' t' the lady, not 'er blinkin' nosewipe.

CHARLIE (*jumping to his feet*) : Oh, yer was, was yer ?

BELLE (*getting between them*) : Take no notice of 'im, Charlie ! It'll annoy 'im all the more.

CHARLIE : 'E ain't goin' t' call me a nosewipe an' git away with it !

BELLE : You do, I'm done with yer ; so there !

CHARLIE (*after hesitation*) : You wait ! (*Quietly*) Me an' you'll settle this some other time.

SAM (*sneering*) : You'll bring all yer tabbies[1] along t' see 'ow I coat[2] yer ?

BELLE (*taking* CHARLIE's *arm*) : You do, now !

SAM (*turning towards street*) : Come on, Ginger. It's too long t' wait till the dog days.

SAM *and* GINGER : Good night, Carlo !

[CHARLIE *and* BELLE *sit.*

CARLO : Goo' nigh', Sam ! Goo' nigh', Ginga !

[1] Girls. [2] Thrash.

[*Exit* SAM *and* GINGER *to street.*

CHARLIE : If you 'adn't been 'ere, I'd 've . . .

BELLE : Don't I know you ain't afraid of 'im ?

CHARLIE (*sullen*) : I'll 'ave 'im, though.

BELLE : You'll do nothink of the kind ! I don't want meself talked about round 'ere.

CHARLIE : If I let 'im git away with a remark like 'e made it'll be me what'll git talked about.

BELLE : What do you care !

CHARLIE (*expostulating*) : I don't know !

BELLE : You ought t' be used to bein' talked about be now.

CHARLIE (*resentful*) : What d'yer mean ? Can't yer *give* that a rest. Yer might be a slop the way yer keep bringin' it up ag'inst me.

BELLE : That's a nice way t' speak to a gel !

CHARLIE : Well, it ain't goin' t' be easy f'r me goin' with you if I've got t' keep me 'ands t' meself when anyone likes t' push a rotten remark at me.

BELLE (*catching* PIETRO's *smile and answering it*) : You ain't bound t' be a friend of mine.

CHARLIE (*glancing round*) : Give over throwin' eyes at that bloke !

BELLE : Aw ! D'yer think I can't look at nobody else but you ?

CHARLIE (*sullenly*) : Looks like yer can.

BELLE (*saucily*) : I've got t' rest me eyes sometime, ain't I ? (*Giving him a sweet smile*) I didn't think you was so doughy.[1]

CHARLIE (*at a loss*) : I took yer t' the pictures, didn't I ?

BELLE : What's that ? Yer took Tessie Bernstein up West.

[1] Soft.

CHARLIE : I'll take you some time.

BELLE (*with a laugh*) : Hmmm, that'll be when the fur coat's mine.

CHARLIE (*on his mettle*) : Come now, if yer like. (*She looks quizzical.*) I know a place where we c'n enjoy ourselves.

BELLE (*with a lift of her brows*) : Trust you !

CHARLIE (*eagerly*) : What about it ? (*She laughs.*) It ain't fur !

BELLE : A lot c'n 'appen in a little way, yer know.

CHARLIE : What've yer got t' be afraid of ?

BELLE : Don't *you* know ?

CHARLIE (*with a terrific effort*) : Look 'ere, don't yer fancy us ?

BELLE (*with a merry laugh*) : What's the matter with yer, f'r Gord-sake ?

CHARLIE (*hoarsely*) : I want t' know. I've 'ad you in me eye f'r a long time.

BELLE (*a little embarrassed*) : It . . . must've been 'orrable painful. (*Exchanges smiles with* PIETRO.)

CHARLIE (*placing his hand over hers on table*) : Honest, I'd do anythink f'r you.

BELLE (*withdrawing her hand, breathlessly*) : 'Ave a bit of sense, do. (*Without much conviction*) I only went with yer because I wanted t' pass a-nhour or two away ; that's all.

CHARLIE (*incisive*) : An' yer'd jest as soon've gorn with anybody else ?

BELLE (*quickly*) : I didn't say that. (*Pause.*) Can't a gel take a little walk with yer but yer must think of 'avin' the banns put up right away ? Much more of you an to-morrow's orf, I tell yer.

CHARLIE : You are comin' to-morrow night ?

BELLE : It's all accordin'.

CHARLIE : Can I 'elp gittin' sweet on yer ?

BELLE (*sweetly*) : Well, I can't. (*Again smiles at* PIETRO.)

CHARLIE (*angrily*) : 'Ere, give over ! (*Glares round at* PIETRO.)

BELLE (*mischievously*) : All them *I*-talians 'ave got nice teeth, don't yer think ?

CHARLIE : You won't think so damn'd much of 'e's rows of palin's after I've done with 'im, if 'e don't look out.

BELLE : Aw, my . . .

CHARLIE : Well . . .

BELLE : I don't see it's well at all.

CHARLIE : If yer don't fancy us, you c'n say, can't yer ?

BELLE : Fancy you ! An' you talkin' that way.

CHARLIE : I could go tatler[1] over you.

BELLE : Why only over me ?

CHARLIE : Aw, give a feller a chance, can't yer ?

BELLE : Flatter yerself *you* want some givin'.

CHARLIE : Won't yer come round the churchyard f'r a-nhour ?

BELLE : I'll soon 'ave t' be gittin' 'ome. (*Smiles.*)

Charlie : If I thought you was muckin' me about . . .

BELLE : Well ? Yer'd what ?

CHARLIE : Nothink.

BELLE : Oh !

CHARLIE : I ain't stoppin' 'ere t' be made a fool of.

BELLE : Good night.

CHARLIE (*in a panic*) : What d'yer mean ?

[1] Crazy.

BELLE (*impulsively seizing his arm as it rests on table*) : Aw, don't be sich a bloomin' misery. (*Releasing him*) Didn't I tell yer not t' take nothink serious ?

CHARLIE (*livelier*) : Awright. To-morrow's on, though ?

BELLE (*touching up her face*) : I'll see.

CHARLIE (*emphatic*) : I'm callin' round for yer, anyway.

BELLE (*alarmed*) : You ain't. I don't want young fellers 'angin' about our place. If my mother was t' see it was you I was goin' out with she'd stop me comin' likely as not. (*Closing her bag with a snap.*) She's got 'er own ideas about who I ought t' go with.

CHARLIE : Where'll I wait, then ?

BELLE : I'll let yer know.

CHARLIE : 'Ow d'yer mean, yer'll . . .

BELLE (*impatient*) : Talk English, don't I ?

CHARLIE (*sharply*) : Did I say yer didn't ?

BELLE (*smiling at* PIETRO) : Ain't you got a nice way of speakin' !

CHARLIE (*doggedly*) : We c'n fix up about to-morrow on yer way 'ome.

BELLE : I'm sayin' good night 'ere.

CHARLIE : 'Ere ? (*She nods.*) 'Ow c'n a feller say good night to a gel in a place like this ?

BELLE : There's nothing against it as far as I know.

CHARLIE (*persuasive*) : Come round the churchyard . . . (*She gives him an arch look.*) I *am* batchy about yer. I . . . honest t'Gord ! (*She smiles at him, sweetly.*) Only f'r ten minutes . . .

[DETECTIVE-SERGEANT BROWN *enters briskly from street. At sight of him Charlie's face becomes dour.*

BELLE (*arranging herself preparatory to leaving*) : No larks, mind.

BROWN (*to* CHARLIE) : Hallo, Charlie ! (BELLE *looks guilty.*) Not out with Tessie to-night ?

CHARLIE (*sullenly*) : No, guv'ner.

BROWN (*to* BELLE) : Ain't you old Bill Collins's daughter ?

BELLE : What if I am ?

BROWN : You've shot up an' no mistake. I ain't been round that way lately. Father same as ever ?

BELLE : 'E's me father still, if that's what yer mean.

BROWN (*pleasantly*) : You take more after yer mother be the sound of yer. (*To* CHARLIE) Was you thinking about going ?

CHARLIE : Yerce, guv'ner.

BROWN (*prodding floor with umbrella*) : Only the chief was saying he'd like a word with yer.

CHARLIE : Oh, yerce. I'll look in when I'm that way.

BROWN (*quietly insistent*) : No time like the present. Don't suppose he'll keep yer long.

CHARLIE (*involuntarily*) : Tessie been sayin' . . .

BROWN (*after a slight pause*) : What *has* she got to say ?

CHARLIE (*forcing a smile*) : Nothink that I know of. S'pose I'd better come. (*Rising slowly to his feet, to* BELLE) Wait f'r us ?

[BELLE *looks as if she has received a shock, and is striving hard to overcome the apparent effects of it, so that she just lowers her head.* CHARLIE *and* BROWN *exit into street.*

Meanwhile CARLO, *with the assistance of* PIETRO, *has been clearing up preparatory to closing the shop for the night. While he sets things*

to his satisfaction behind counter, PIETRO, *having donned an apron, is busy sweeping up in front of it. At last he works up to near where* BELLE *is sitting, and she looks up at him and smiles.*

PIETRO (*diffident*) : Goo' nigh', ess ?

BELLE (*sharply, to hide her embarrassment*) : What ? Are you wantin' t' shut up ?

PIETRO (*bending towards her*) : Howa you say ?

BELLE (*pulling herself together*) : I was jest goin'.

PIETRO : Me no gotta lotta Ingleese.

BELLE (*smiling*) : No ? (PIETRO *laughs nervously and makes play with broom-handle.*) Carlo's nephew, ain't yer ?

PIETRO : Carlo him uncle for me ; ees so !

[ANNIE COLLINS, BELLE's *mother, a large, stout woman of forty-five, appears on threshold. She is poorly but tidily dressed and hatless ; and is one of those people who appear always to have just come from a very hot bath. Her voice when raised is raucous, and at moments like the present she seems a thorough virago.*

ANNIE (*from doorway*) : Now, then ! (PIETRO *and* BELLE *start, and* CARLO, *behind counter, drops a cup.*) Where's . . .

BELLE (*rising*) : I was jest comin', Mum.

ANNIE (*entering*) : I'll jest comin' yer ! (*Looks fiercely at* PIETRO, *who drops back from her.*) Where's the other feller ?

BELLE (*resentful*) : What other feller ? I s'pose Uncle Sam's been up 'ome blowin'[1] about me !

ANNIE (*folding her arms and nodding*) : Charlie Stubbs ! A nice dam' figure you're makin' of yerself, me lady !

BELLE (*resentful*) : It don't do t' go be what you 'ear of people !

[1] Telling.

ANNIE : That's t' prepare me f'r what I'll soon be 'earin' of you, I s'pose. Where is 'e ? I'll Stubbs 'im !

BELLE : Aw, Mum, you are awful.

ANNIE (*swallowing hard*) : I'm what ! (*Mastering herself with obvious effort*) Come on now !

BELLE (*ashamed*) : It's awright. You go on. (*As* ANNIE *remains firm, petulant*) I'm comin' !

ANNIE (*strident*) : I know dam' well you are ! Be careful 'ow yer go, me lady, or I'll give yer summink t' be out this time of night for. 'Urry up. Yer father's abed, an' I've left the door on the jar.

BELLE (*slowly moving towards street*) : Awright. (*Looks at* ANNIE *and laughs.*)

ANNIE (*tight lipped*) : Mind yerself, now !

BELLE (*turning to her*) : Well, I think it's rotten t' 'ave you runnin' after me everywhere I go. As if I was only a kid. . . . (ANNIE *turns her about and pushes her into street.*) Awright ! Don't shove. . . .

CARLO (tentatively) : Goo' nigh', meesees !

ANNIE (*leaning in*) : You encourage 'er in 'ere ag'in this time of night an' I'll about knock 'ell out of yer ; so there !

[*Exit* BELLE *and* ANNIE *into street.*

CARLO (*mopping his head*) : Ees woman ! Pouf !

[CHARLIE *runs in from street.*

CHARLIE (*his face dropping as he discovers* BELLE *is no longer there*) : Just my bloomin' luck. (*To* PIETRO) *You* fancy yer chance, don't yer ?

PIETRO : Howa you say ?

CHARLIE : 'Owa I say ! Yer didn't try an' queer my pitch I s'pose ?

[PIETRO *looks to* CARLO, *who has come from behind counter, for enlightenment.*

CARLO (*to* CHARLIE) : You no can maka row for him.

CHARLIE : Let 'im come outside, round the churchyard, an' I'll turn 'im into a rainbow.

CARLO (*reasoning with him*) : Him no do harm for you, Charlie.

[*Unobserved of any of them, a* POLICEMAN *has appeared outside door in street, his back at the moment being presented to view.*

CHARLIE : 'E ain't, ain't 'e ? Smilin' an' glad-eyein' a feller's gel right under e's blinkin' nose might go down where 'e comes from, but if 'e comes that lark 'ere an' thinks 'e c'n git away with it, it's up t' somebody t' learn 'im different. (*Louder*) An' I'm the feller t' do it an' all !

[POLICEMAN *turns, takes in the situation, and comes just over threshold.*

POLICEMAN (*at the sound of whose voice they all turn*) : Now, then ; who's f'r eatin' who ?

CHARLIE (his demeanour changing magically) : 'Allo, 'Arry ! What're you doin' 'ere ? (*Saunters towards him.*)

POLICEMAN (*eyeing him*) : Lookin' f'r trouble.

CHARLIE (*as they stand to either side of doorway*) : Go on ! (*Moves towards street.*) Comin' my way ?

POLICEMAN (*as* CHARLIE *steps into street*) : No. (CHARLIE *looks at him before disappearing from view.*) I thought p'r'aps you was comin' mine.

CURTAIN

ACT II

Interior of a barber's shop in the same neighbourhood as the café.

TIME : *Early morning till noon of the following day.*

SCENE : *It is an out-of-date establishment, such as can be stumbled on in the East End even to-day.* BILL COLLINS, BELLE'S *father, whose business it is, has managed to drag along in a haphazard way ever since he set up for himself on marrying* ANNIE *roughly twenty-five years ago. Although he long ago acquired the undelightful habit of railing at everything in general and the "times" in particular for his inability to derive more than a meagre living, he has always failed to realise that the cause of his trouble is his own inability to keep within even clutching distance of the skirts of progress in his own trade.*

Upstage left, a door communicating with the living-rooms of the house. From this, running the entire length to downstage left, a bench with two basins inset, and on the wall over each a mirror in a chipped black frame. Between these, attached to wall, is a rough fixture containing a poor stock of cosmetics, brilliantines, shampoos in dusty bottles, etc ; and below on the bench itself a meagre array of barbering tackle is carelessly distributed. Towards downstage end of bench is a small urn, very discoloured, perched precariously above a gas-ring.

Right and back are two six-foot forms ; and another door communicating with a lobby and the street door is right. This door has a window in the upper half of it, with the legend "Shaving Saloon" hardly discernible.

Occurring at intervals on the varnished-papered walls are old, discoloured sporting almanacs, together with one or two trade notices of as dingy appearance.

Situated before each basin are two old-type barber-

chairs. The floor is covered with oilcloth, very much the worse for wear in places.

At the opening of scene door left is open and the set empty of all save the appointments enumerated.

ANNIE (*off L.*) : Oh, you 'ave got up !

[BELLE *enters L., yawning and stretching. She is not quite the trim figure of the previous act ; but, allowing for the earliness of the hour, and that she is wearing a washed-out shirt-blouse, a work-a-day skirt, worn-out shoes, and has her bobbed hair in paper curlers, she is not hard to identify with the* BELLE *of the last act.*

ANNIE (*entering L.*) : Where's yer father ? 'E gittin' up ? (*She comes straight from the wash-tub, and is coarse-aproned, red-armed, red-faced, has her hair dishevelled, and altogether far from pleasant-looking.*)

BELLE (*who is uncurling her hair before mirror upstage*) : 'Ow do I know ?

ANNIE (*angrily*) : What d'yer mean ?

BELLE : Didn't expect me to look, did yer ?

ANNIE : 'Ere's me with me fust boil on before eether of yer are down. (*Exits R., whence she is heard unbolting street door.* BELLE *is now brushing out her hair before mirror.* ANNIE *re-enters R., with morning paper and milk-can.*) Upon me sam, I don't know why I've got t' put up with the pair of yer. (*Hesitating by door L.*) Yer might well look at yerself, me lady !

(*Exits L. ; and is followed a moment later by* BELLE. SAM *enters R. After a quick glance round scene, he goes quickly across to bench, takes down a bottle of brilliantine, and proceeds to dress his hair to his own satisfaction.*

ANNIE (*off L., causing* SAM *to start*) : What're you doin' there ?

BELLE (*off L.*) : C'n clean me teeth, can't I ?

ANNIE : Git none of that tooth muck in my blue

water, or I'll shove yer 'ead in it. (BELLE *laughs.*) Laugh at me, yer . . .

BELLE : Who c'n 'elp it ?

ANNIE : Git 'old of that broom an' go an' give the shop a sweep.

[*Sam carefully and speedily dons his cap and retreats to just within door R.* BELLE *enters L. with broom.*

SAM (*genially*) : 'Ello, kid.

BELLE (*morosely*) : 'Ello, lagger.[1]

SAM : Snotty,[2] eh ?

BELLE : You don't know what for, I s'pose ? (*Starts to sweep.*)

SAM : Seein' yer mother at the door waitin' for yer on me way up 'ome last night, wasn't it only natural I'd tip 'er the wink you was down the road askin' f'r trouble ?

BELLE : That's only your idea.

SAM : Ask anyone yer like. They'll tell yer Charlie Stubbs is the championist bloke t' pair up with f'r findin' trouble.

BELLE : You ain't man ernough t' tell 'im so to 'e's face.

SAM : Who ain't ?

BELLE : You ain't.

SAM (*with swagger*) : Ain't I ! (*She laughs.*) Last night I didn't try an' put a spoke in 'e's wheel, I s'pose ?

BELLE (*sneering*) : Only I didn't let yer. (*Suspends sweeping*) What's what I do got t' do with you, anyway ?

SAM (*easily*) : Just why I dropped word into yer mother.

BELLE (*impertinent*) : Go hon, you do surprise me ! (ANNIE *enters L.*)

[1] Sneak. [2] Uncivil.

ANNIE (*to* SAM) : Aw, it's you. (*To* BELLE) Now, then, buck into it an' git done. (BELLE *grimaces as her mother turns again to* SAM.) I wondered who the 'ell it could be she'd got 'ere chewin'[1] to. What's bit you that you're up an' about so blasted early ?

SAM (*resentfully*) : What d'yer mean ?

ANNIE : Got some more dud 'orses yer want t' give my feller ?

BELLE (*having swept down to* SAM) : If you don't mind . . .

SAM : I can't do more than give 'im the information I get f'r what it's worth.

ANNIE : What 'e's 'ad orf yer lately's been worth quite a bit. But not t' im.

SAM : An', ag'in, yer can't expect t' make yer losses good if you're goin' t' bet in bits all the time.

ANNIE : Seems t' me you want 'im t' bet in lumps an' only win in bits. (*Coughs, because of dust* BELLE *has been raising.*)

SAM (*sympathetic*) : You ought t' take summink f'r that, Annie.

ANNIE (*gasping*) : What ?

SAM : That there chest of yourn.

ANNIE (*indignant*) : Don't you be so dam' personal ! (*Givin* BELLE *a push*) Do yer want t' poison us all ?

BELLE (*resentfully*) : Doin' me best, ain't I ! (*Sulky*) Sweepin' ain't my job.

ANNIE : You'll do it, all the same. For two pins I'd make yer give me a 'and with the washin' an' all.

BELLE : Ugh, that would come right.

ANNIE : That's more than the washin' would, I lay me life. (*To* SAM) Well ?

[1] Talking.

SAM : What ?

ANNIE (*snappy*) : What d'yer come for ?

SAM : Oh . . . aw . . . dropped in, that's all.

ANNIE : Well, yer better drop out ag'in. I'm in the middle of washin', an' we ain't 'ad breakfast yut.

BELLE (*having swept dirt over* SAM's *polished shoes*) : D'you mind ?

SAM (*stepping hastily aside*) : 'Ere, what the 'ell d'yer think you're playin' ? (*Polishes shoes on his trousers.*)

BELLE : Got eyes, ain't yer ?

ANNIE (*to* SAM) : We want none of that dam' language 'ere !

SAM (*turning away in dudgeon*) : Tell 'im I'll be back. (*Exits R.*)

ANNIE (*shouting after him*) : Give 'im yer bad news yourself ! (*To* BELLE) What d'you want with kickin' up sich a dust !

BELLE (*sweeping out of door R.*) : I only done it to git red of 'im.

ANNIE : Oh, yer did, did yer ! Well, jest you remember, whatever else you might think 'e is, 'e's yer uncle, an' treat 'im as such. (BELLE *exits R., sweeping.*) D'yer 'ear me !

BELLE (*off R.*) : Reckon I'd want a hoperation if I couldn't.

ANNIE (*starting*) : What d'yer say, yer saucy 'ound ? (BELLE *re-enters R., smiling provokingly.*) You'll go on an' go on till I lam yer. (*Turns and exits L.*)

BELLE : When're they goin' t' treat me as if I wasn't a kid ? That's what I'd like to know.

ANNIE (*off L.*) : You don't mean t' say you're hup !

BILL (*entering L.*) : Do I look as if I'm still in bed, do I ? (*He is a tall, cadaverous man of fifty, of untidy appearance. Sleep still hangs to him, and it is not until well on in act that he seems fairly awake. He is in shirtsleeves.*)

ANNIE (*off L.*) : Yer don't look so dam' diff'rent that yer c'n lay yer affydavy. (*Appears on threshold L.*)

BILL (*to* BELLE) : *You* better keep out of my way if yer don't want t' feel the weight of me 'and. Dirty little . . .

BELLE (*resentfully*) : I like that !

ANNIE (*pushing her through L.*) : Never mind what yer like or don't like. You git inside an' 'ave yer breakfast.

BELLE (indignant) : What right's 'e got t' call me a . . . (ANNIE *closes door on her.*)

ANNIE (*to* BILL, *who, before mirror upstage, is pulling his unhealthy face about*) : Ain't you got better sense than that ? T' go orf at 'er directly yer clap eyes on 'er ! (*He growls.*) D'yer want to 'ave 'er clear out, an' us none the wiser where she's gorn or what's come to 'er ? It's all I can do sometimes t' keep me 'ands orf 'er. Still . . . My Gord, if only she was a kid ag'in, an' a wallop in the right place would 'ave the same effect as it used to.

BILL (*yawning*) : Never got ernough of 'em when she was younger. That's been the trouble with 'er from the fust.

ANNIE : Not orf you, no. She might never've known she'd got a father f'r the interest you've took in 'er, it 'adn't been f'r seein' yer alwers about the place. Seems you're never done lookin' after gels. When they're kids yer *can* tan their little 'ides an' shove 'em in bed t' cry it out ; but when they git the age she is, specially in a neighbourhood like this, you've got t' be dam' careful what yer say to 'em.

(*Fiercely*) She goes an' does summink through you, I'll . . .

BILL : What's she got t' do through me ?

ANNIE : I'm tellin' yer t' see she don't. (*Pause.*) What d'yer say you'd 'ave f'r yer breakfast ?

BILL : Who said anythink about breakfast ?

ANNIE : I did. I'm askin' yer what d'yer want ?

BILL (*grimacing*) : Aw . . . I don't know as I want any. . . . (*Seeing her turn towards door L.*) What've yer got ?

ANNIE (*returning*) : Oh, so yer've thought better of it. There's a-negg.

BILL (*tired*) : What, ag'in ! (*Grumbling*) A lot of good doctors writin' in the papers about what you ought to eat when you've got to 'ave what yer missus likes t' git yer.

ANNIE : Doctors ! Let me 'ave the feedin' of 'em f'r a week ; they'd 'ave summink t' write about. (ANNIE *exits L.*)

BILL (*solus*) : They would an' all. (*Picks up comb from bench.*) It's a wonder I ain't the dead spit of a White Leghorn or summink, the eggs I've 'ad in my time. (*Glaring at comb*) 'Ere's where the profits go ! Usin' best brilliantine as if it's no more account than water ! (*Despondent*) What's the good ? You might as well talk t' the dead.

[*Runs his hand tightly along comb, and, with the brilliantine he wipes from it, rubs his own hair thoroughly.* FRED ANNING *enters R. He is wearing new black trousers, and boots that squeak, and his work-a-day jacket and waistcoat and cap.*

FRED (*casually*) : Mornin', Bill.

BILL (*busily arranging his hair*) : Shan't keep yer a minute.

FRED (*taking seat on form R.*) : No 'urry. (*As he fills pipe from tobacco-box.*) The funeral ain't till one.

BILL (*searching bench*) : No dam' matches ag'in !

FRED (*lighting pipe*) : D'yer want a light ? (*Hands* BILL *matches.*)

[BILL *lights gas under urn.* BELLE *enters L.*

BELLE (*to* BILL) : Mum wants to know if you're comin' t' yer breakfast ? (*To* FRED) Mornin', Mister Annin' !

[FRED *nods.*

BILL (*to* BELLE) : Don't *you* talk t' me ! (*Hands matches to* FRED.)

BELLE (*tossing her head*) : Ugh. . . . (*To* FRED) Nice day you've got for the funeral.

BILL (*to* BELLE) : 'Ave you been at the brilliantine ag'in ? (*As she turns towards door L.*) Am I talkin' t' meself, or what ?

BELLE : What, p'r'aps. Unless yer told 'im the same as yer did me.

BILL (*enraged*) : You come it with me, yer saucy brat, I'll let yer know who I am !

BELLE (*unabashed*) : Don't kid yourself I don't know ! After the years we've 'ad of yer.

BILL (*appealing to* FRED) : That's the way she's been brought up—to think nothink of 'er father.

BELLE (*contemptuous*) : You ought t' know if yer 'mount t' much.

BILL : That's all the thanks I git f'r strugglin' t' keep a roof over their 'eads all these years. T' say nothink of the way me 'ealth's been ruined doin' it.

BELLE (*ironical*) : I s'pose Mum's spent everlastin' 'ours at the wash-tub f'r as long as I remember f'r fun ?

BILL : I c'n see you comin' to a sticky end, me gel, if yer don't watch out.

BELLE : It won't be slavin' me guts out to 'elp keep me old man. Not if I can 'elp it.

[*Fred shows interest in the duel by an occasional lift of his eyebrows and grimacing.*

BILL (*to* FRED) : Rowin' an' keepin' comp'ny with tea-leafs[1] at 'er time of life ! That's a nice thing f'r a father to 'ave t' put up with, ain't it ?

BELLE (*laughing*) : You don't sound as if it is.

BILL : 'Ere's me strugglin' 'ard t' keep me little bit of trade together, an' me pretty daughter's in tow with one of the biggest crooks in the neighbourhood.

BELLE : Yer pretty daughter ain't in tow with nobody ; so you c'n get that idea out of your 'ead.

BILL : D'yer think she realises what it means t' be a tradesman's gel ? (BELLE *laughs.*) See ? Got no natural pride, or nothink.

[ANNIE *bustles in.*

ANNIE (*exasperated*) : Are *you* comin' t' yer breakfast, or yer stomach gorn back on yer ag'in ? (*Noticing* FRED) 'Allo, Fred !

FRED : Mornin', missus.

ANNIE (*to* BELLE) : So you've been shewin' Mister Annin' what a nice sort of gel you are !

BILL (*by door L.*) : What right 'ave I got t' be spoke to as if I was dirt by me own daughter !

BELLE (*indignant*) : What right 'ave mother an' you got t' think I can't look at a feller without bein' up t' no good ?

ANNIE (*looking at* FRED) : An' what's all this got t' do with Fred 'ere ?

BELLE (*in a pet*) : Well, 'e started it ! (*Jerks her head at* BILL.)

BILL (*gesticulating wildly*) : One of these days you'll both git me so . . . so . . . so . . .

[1] Thieves.

ANNIE (*barking at him*) : Go an' 'ave yer breakfast, you ! (BILL *exits L. precipitately.*) Now, then, Fred ! Shave, yer want ?

FRED (*uneager*) : No 'urry, missus. I can wait f'r Bill. Funeral ain't till one.

[BELLE *is dusting shop in a lackadaisical manner.*

ANNIE : One o'clock.

FRED : From the 'ouse, that is. Arf-past at the ground.

ANNIE : It's a fine day you've got f'r it.

FRED : In a manner of speakin', yus. An' yut, no. I mean, from the point of view of the body.

ANNIE (*with a shudder*) : I don't 'old with lookin' at things that way. 'Ow's the missus ?

FRED : The way she's takin' on, sniv'lin' an' that, it fair gives yer rheumatics t' go near 'er. That's why I come across now ; t' git out of the way.

ANNIE (*nodding*) : She's upset. (*Briskly*) Well, this won't git the washin' done. (*As she withdraws L.*) You're quite sure you don't mind waitin' ?

[*He nods, and* ANNIE *exits L.*

FRED : Upset ! No doubt. But there is a limit, yer know. When people git over the three score an' ten they ought t' think they're gittin' somethink bukshee out of life. Leastways, it ought not to owe 'em nothink. Seventy-eight ain't a bad age, yer know.

BELLE : Is that what yer aunt was ?

FRED : Not mine ; the missus's. If she'd 've, lived till the day after next Valentine's Day, whenever that is, she'd 've been seventy-nine. Good many 'as t' take the knock before then.

BELLE : I should try an' not take it so much to 'eart, Mister Annin'.

FRED : You've got it all wrong if yer think

I do. Don't I tell yer if yer git t' the age of old auntie it's ag'in reason t' want t' live. An' f'r them what's left t' kick up rough is nothink more nor less than flyin' in the face of Providence.

BELLE (*having finished dusting*) : None of us c'n 'elp our natures.

[BELLE *exits L.*

FRED (*philosophical*) : Might be somethink in that.

ANNIE (*off L.*) : Well, then . . . . Yerce, I know ! What's the matter with *you* ?

[FRED *chuckles to himself.*

BILL (*off L.*) : You stand there and ask me what's the matter with me !

ANNIE (*sarcastic*) : If yer want me to, I'll set down an' ask yer. There !

[BILL *enters L.*

BILL (*turning on threshold, L.*) : Yer damned old mother drove yer poor old father t' Claybury ; an' what with you an' yer pretty daughter, that's what'll 'appen t' me before yer done !

[*Slams door and retreats to centre. Immediately it is burst open, and* ANNIE *appears on threshold.*

ANNIE : What a bit of luck that 'ud be ! (*With an ironic laugh*) Yer'll drop us a line when you're goin', I s'pose ? I'd like you t' 'ave a clean shirt or two t' go in with.

[BELLE *appears behind* ANNIE.

BELLE (*ashamed*): Oh, come on, Mum.

ANNIE (*snapping at her*) : 'Old yer tongue, *you* ! (*To* BILL) What's it t' be ? Are yer goin' t' eat yer breakfast like a Christian, or are yer goin' t' do the other thing ?

BILL (*to* FRED) : 'Ow would you like eggs f'r breakfast f'r a-nole blasted week ? (FRED *tries to look non-committal.*) Yus, an' one of 'em bad

this mornin'. Wouldn't that git up your nose ?[1]

[*The rest laugh.*

ANNIE : That's right, Fred ; laugh at 'im. (*To* BILL) What d'yer say you're fond of heggs for ?

BILL : Do I want 'em every day, do I ?

ANNIE (*to* BILL) : Think yerself lucky. . . .

BILL : An' if I did, yer don't think I'm goin' t' eat a bad 'un to show 'ow fond of 'em I am, do yer ?

ANNIE : Takes a bad egg t' know a bad egg, that's about the strength of it.

BILL : It's your sense of proportion's the trouble. Because I 'appen t' say I like a-negg, you think I've got t' 'ave 'em till I can't see nothink but yeller an' white. Till the whole blasted place looks like a football team gorn mad. (BELLE *laughs.*) It ain't ernough f'r me to 'ave me pretty daughter gittin' the shop a bad name ; yer want t' poison me as well.

BELLE (*indignant*) : I like that !

ANNIE (*to* BELLE) : If yer don't want summink yer don't like you'd better git out there an' wash them breakfast-things up. (*As* BELLE *doesn't move*) Go on, now, before I start on yer. (BELLE *turns to go, but remains in view.* ANNIE *turns again to* BILL.) You will keep all on 'arpin' an' 'arpin' an' 'arpin'. If you'd 've kept yerself t' yer business as yer should, instead of bein' so took up with the gee-gees, an' a 'ell of a lot of .other things yer know nothink about—politics an' that there—we might 've been out of this be now. P'r'aps livin' where she'd git a chance of rubbin' shoulders with decent people once in a while. (*Turning to* FRED) Not as I've got anythink ag'in *some* as live round 'ere. (FRED *nods, as if to say,* " Don't mind me.")

[1] Anger you.

BILL : Of course, whatever trouble she falls into, *I'm* t' blame ! Decent people ! Er ! A lot of chance I'd 'ave with sichlike tied up to the likes of . . .

ANNIE (*pushing back her sleeves*) : Go on. (*Moving towards him, he retreating*) Say it. Go on, only say it !

BELLE (*entering*) : Mum ! Mum ! Don't make a hexhibition of yerself.

ANNIE (*turning on her*) : What did I tell yer to do ? What did I tell yer to do ? (BELLE *stands her ground.*) If you can't keep out of it when me an' yer father's got a diff'rence of opinion on, *I'll* make a hexhibition of you it'll be worth a quid t' see else.

[FRED *rises, catches* BILL'S *eye, and intimates by signs that he will come back later. Exit* FRED *R.*

BELLE (*scornfully*) : You will ! (*Immediately* ANNIE'S *hand flashes out and strikes her on the cheek.*)

ANNIE (*roaring*) : Now will yer go an' do what you're told ?

BELLE (*choking back her tears*) : I . . . I'll see you dam'd first !

ANNIE (*regretfully*) : What d'yer want t' work me up to it for ?

BELLE (*wildly*) : I ain't goin' t' stay 'ere ! I can't do nothink right ! Yer treat me as if I was still a kid. . . . I've 'ad about ernough of it. You're alwers goin' orf at me about the way I be'ave. Look at yerselves, the way yer go on !

ANNIE (*fast recovering possession of herself*) : D'ye know who you're talkin' to ?

BILL : Let 'er go ! Let 'er go ! An' be dam'd to 'er.

ANNIE (*in a panic*) : Go where, f'r Gord's sake ?

BELLE (*with a scornful laugh*) : D'yer think 'e cares ? I don't blame 'im. I wouldn't . . . not if I never see 'im ag'in.

BILL : D'yer 'ear that ? D'yer 'ear that ?

ANNIE (*quieter*) : That's no way t' speak to yer father.

BELLE : Let *'im* remember it, then, an' speak t' me prop'ly. I ain't a kid. An' I ain't stoppin' 'ere t' be treated as if I was, so there. Whatever comes t' me, I shan't starve or go 'ungry f'r not 'avin' me mother . . . (*sneering*) . . . an' me father t' watch me every step.

BILL : Let 'er go ! She'll soon discover which side 'er bread was buttered. Be back 'ere cryin' in no time an' all. Directly she tumbles[1] life ain't all pictures an' makin' up yer face—you'll see !

ANNIE (*vehemently*) : Whatever I see I'll never 'ear sense from you. Where's yer 'eart ? She's yourn as well as mine, ain't she ?

BELLE (*ironical*) : Yer wouldn't think so.

ANNIE (*firmly but kindly*) : That's quite ernough of it, now. In yer go an' clear them breakfast things up. (BELLE *tosses her head.*) You ought t' be only too glad t' be a bit of a 'elp t' yer mother. You . . . you mustn't take things to 'eart so much. After all, I 'ave got *your* good at 'eart. (*Roughly fondling her shoulder*) P'r'aps you'll be able t' git summink t' do before long ; summink better than you've been at. We c'n 'ave a talk about things all on our own—when I've got more time. Come on, now, there's a dear. Won't yer ?

[ANNIE *smiles at her, and* BELLE *tosses her head, gives her father a challenging glance, and hurries off L, closing door after her.*

ANNIE (*with a heavy sigh*) : My Gord . . .

BILL : Lay down, why don't yer ? Let 'er wipe 'er blasted boots on yer.

ANNIE (*careful not to raise her voice*) : What a dam'

[1] Learns.

good job it is for you that I'm a pretty even-tempered sort of woman. If you 'ad some—my poor old mother, f'r instance, 'eaven rest 'er soul . . .

BILL : *That* old cow !

ANNIE (*beginning with a shout, then dropping her voice*) : You'll never 'ave no luck ! You'll never 'ave no luck, speakin' of the dead departed that way. That's the grand figure of man'ood you are ! Can't say a good word of nobody ; not even f'r them what ain't got the power of sayin' one f'r 'emselves.

BILL : A good word f'r 'er ! Wasn't she 'ere livin' with us f'r months ? Is it likely I'd 'ave, after the way she got the old man ? An' that's what'll 'appen t' me before yer done. I'll be in the batchy crib yut, I shouldn't wonder.

ANNIE : No more wouldn't I. But, there, you're not all that *right* that goin' wrong 'ud make any diff'rence in yer.

BILL : You needn't tell me you'd like t' see me put away.

ANNIE : I ain't been married to yer all these years for nothink. (*Moves towards L.*) What more I've got t' say t' yer'll keep.

[FRED *enters hurriedly R.*

FRED (*excitedly*) : Missus Collins, c'n yer come across an' see after my old woman ? She's chucked a sixer[1]—fit or somethink—an' I can't bring 'er round no'ow.

ANNIE (*starting*) : Aw, my Gord ! (*Tears open door L, and calls*) Belle, see 'ow that copper is !

FRED (*fearful*) : Only 'ope t' Gord I don't 'ave t' go an' bury old Auntie on me own. What a blasted fool of a woman t' go an' chuck a dummy at a time like this ! I've shouted 'er, an' clouted 'er, but d'yer think she'll come round ?

BELLE (*off L.*) : It's all right, Mum !

[1] Fainted.

ANNIE (*shouting*) : It comes t' the boil, lift the lid ! (*To* FRED) Come on, Fred ! (ANNIE *and* FRED *exit R.*)

BILL (*who has looked rather flabbergasted*) : Yer see ! 'Unts everybody's trouble but 'er own. What's it t' do with 'er what another female likes t' do ? (*Slight pause.*) There's too many of 'em in the world, any'ow. No. She must be in it. Fainted ! What though ? Them as faint 'ave got t' come round some time.

[CHARLIE STUBBS *enters R. cautiously with parcel, closing door quietly behind him,* BILL *busy arranging tackle on bench, doesn't notice him, and* CHARLIE *sits on form.*

Who's Fred Annin's old woman that other people should be disturbed because she 'appens t' drop orf ? (CHARLIE *grins.*) If *I* ain't up t' the mark, an' I *do* 'appen t' mention it, do I git 'er workin' 'erself up over me ? No " You ought t' know when you've 'ad ernough," that's all the sympathy I git. (*Seeing* CHARLIE *reflected in downstage mirror, he comes to a stand.*) Who the . . . (*Swinging round.*) What . . .

CHARLIE (*attempting an ingratiating smile*) : It's awright, Mister Collins ; don't mind me.

BILL : What do you want 'ere ? (*Points with a razor.*)

CHARLIE (*rising*) : Yer'd better be careful yer don't cut yerself, mind.

BILL : You mind. . . . Don't yer think you've got a blasted cheek ?

CHARLIE (*smiling*) : I'm thinkin' anythink you do while yer've got that in yer 'and.

BILL : Pokin' yer 'ead in the lion's den, as yer might say.

CHARLIE : Yer might, if there was any lions.

BILL (*angrier*) : This ain't a jokin' matter.

CHARLIE : I know. Belle about ?

BILL : You git out of this ! Go on ! Before the old woman sees yer.

CHARLIE : Aw, be a sport, Mister Collins. You was young yerself once. (BELLE *enters L.*) What yer, Belle !

BILL (*to* BELLE, *who has shown surprise*) : Yer know what yer mother said !

BELLE (*to* CHARLIE) : You ain't lost for it, I must say !

BILL : Don't yer 'ave nothink t' do with 'im ! (*To* CHARLIE) An' you take the straight tip from me 'ere an' now : we ain't seein' you 'avin' nothink t' do with the likes of 'er ; so there.

BELLE (*to* BILL) : I *can* speak f'r meself, I s'pose ?

BILL : So long as yer tell 'im same as yer mother said, yer can.

CHARLIE (*to* BILL) : Don't see 'ow you're goin' t' help yerself if she wants to.

BELLE (*eyeing him*) : Oh, *you* don't ! An' d'yer think she do ?

BILL (*approving*) : That's the way . . .

CHARLIE (*to* BELLE, *very earnestly*) : *You* would if yer was in my place.

[BELLE *smiles.*

BILL : Your place ain't 'ere. That ought to be ernough f'r you.

BELLE (*sarcastic*) : I was sorry I couldn't wait till yer *friends* 'ad done with yer last night.

CHARLIE : That's kickin' a chap when 'e's down, that is.

BELLE (*wincing*) : An' another thing ; didn't I tell yer I didn't want fellers round 'ere after me ?

BILL (*waving at door R.*) : You've got yer answer ; now yer better git.

CHARLIE (*embarrassed*) : I didn't mean t' come. True as Gord, I didn't. I . . . I . . . I don't often git up as early as I done this mornin'.

BILL : No ; you're generally goin' t' kip[1] about now.

[CHARLIE *looks hurt.*

BELLE (*to* BILL, *reproving*) : Gittin' quite smart in yer old age, ain't yer ?

CHARLIE : (*quietly*) : I don't know what's up with me. All last night I couldn't sleep f'r thinkin' of yer. (*She laughs.*) Go on, make a feller feel a fool. (*With an even greater effort*) Even the church clock bangin' the quarters out was knockin' your name into me t' music like.

BILL (*amazed and angry*) : 'Ere, that's ernough of that sort of talk.

BELLE (*to* CHARLIE, *quizzing him*) : Fancy ! Ain't you real !

CHARLIE : Straight away, though. An' I've gorn orf me grub an' all.

BELLE : Look at the money you'll be in pocket if it lasts !

CHARLIE : Don't be so bloomin' 'ard on a feller.

BILL (*enraged*) : You'll 'ave summink 'ard on yer if yer don't clear out when you're told.

CHARLIE (*to* BELLE) ! I can't set down for long, I can't. What I mean is, see, I didn't mean t' come 'ere. Really. Nor this way even. Just come out for a stretch, that's all. Bit of a mooch. But some'ow the more I mooched the more the turnin' kept all on passin' me. Though I knew very well it was my fault an' not the turnin's. You c'n call me a date[2] if yer like.

BILL (*exasperated by the way he is being ignored*) : What am *I* ? What *am* I ?

CHARLIE : An' all of a sudden like I found meself 'ere. I did want t' come an' I didn't want t' come. Know what I mean ?

BELLE (*with a smile, quietly*) : Do you ?

[1] Bed. [2] Soft, fool.

BILL : Gor blimy ! I'll set the missis on yer if yer don't clear out !

CHARLIE : I wanted t' see yer.

BELLE : Well, you've seen me. (*Laughs.*)

CHARLIE (*resentful*) : What d'yer think a feller's feelin's are like : a soft roe on a fishmonger's slab ?

BILL (*darting at door L.*) Yer goin' ?

CHARLIE (*defiant, to* BILL) : No, I ain't. You c'n go an' call forty old women if yer like. (BILL *exits L.*)

BILL (*off L.*) : Annie ! Annie !

BELLE : Don't you care. She ain't in.

CHARLIE : So long as you ain't got a down on me, I ain't carin' f'r nobody.

BELLE : " I *did* ought to 'ave. Still, p'r'aps I might meet yer to-night after all.

CHARLIE : Couldn't come out now, I s'pose ? (*She looks surprised.*) We would go up West. To the pictures ? Anywhere ! You've only got t' say the word.

BELLE (*coyly*) : I might a bit later. Not now. My mother's got it in f'r me over you. I wouldn't stop now, if I was you. (*He turns and takes up parcel from seat.*) She might come in. What've yer got there ?

CHARLIE (*untying string*) : Guess what ?

BELLE (*eager as a child*) : I don't know. . . .

CHARLIE (*pocketing string*) : S'posin' it's a fur-coat ? (*Discovers to her widening eyes a coney seal coat.*)

BELLE (*breathlessly*) : You got it f'r someone ?

CHARLIE (*shaking coat out*) : Ain't got it f'r meself.

BELLE (*excitedly*) : Let's see ! (*He presses it on her.*) Aw my !

CHARLIE : D'yer like it ?

BELLE (*almost reverently*) : What a question ! It's a real beauty. One of the latest an' all, ain't it ?

CHARLIE : Feller I got it orf of said so. Don't know a lot about 'em meself. I got it cheap along of a turn I done 'im some time ago.

BELLE : Looks quite as good as the one they 'ad in Bunton's winder with ten guineas on it. Better ! Who d'yer git it for ?

CHARLIE : D'yer know anyone as 'ud like it ?

BELLE : Wouldn't I ? (*Despondent.*) I can't 'ave it, though.

CHARLIE : Who says yer can't ? (*Takes it from her.*)

BELLE (*with a laugh*) : What, me ?

CHARLIE : You said you'd like one.

BELLE : Wouldn't any gel ? She'd be loopy[1] else.

CHARLIE (*holding it up*) : Put it on.

BELLE (*indicating her shabbiness*) : What, over these ?

CHARLIE : I dare say worse than them've been wore under a fur smother before t'day. (*He has it on her almost before she realises it.*)

BELLE (*apologising to the coat*) : I didn't ought to, really I didn't.

CHARLIE (*smoothing coat down on shoulders and stepping back*) : It's f'r *you.*

BELLE (*startled*) : Don't spruce.[2] (*Laughs.*)

CHARLIE (*admiring her*) : Who says I ain't got a-neye after that ? Gor bly . . . jest as if it was made for yer.

BELLE (*snuggling her chin into collar*) : Don't arf

[1] Mad. [2] Lie.

make yer feel good. (*Runs to downstage mirror and surveys herself from tip to toe.*) Makes me look nice an' naughty an' all. (*Ogles* CHARLIE *from over her shoulder.*)

CHARLIE (*moving slowly towards her*) : Didn't I tell yer . . .

[BILL *enters L.*

BILL (*entering*) : 'As 'e gorn, 'as 'e ? (*Amazed at sight of* BELLE *in coat*) What the . . . Where d'yer git that from ?

CHARLIE (*to* BELLE) : Yer look *that* pretty you wouldn't know yerself, if you was lookin' at yer 'stead of me.

BELLE (*reluctantly*) : Still, I don't think I ought . . .

BILL (*seizing her arm*) : What's the blasted game ? D'yer think I'm talkin' t' meself, or what ?

BELLE (*throwing off his hand*) : 'Ere, keep yer 'ands t' yerself.

BILL : Why ain't yer mother 'ere instead of 'untin' other people's trouble ? (*As he moves swiftly towards R., to* CHARLIE) All she's been waitin' for is to 'ave a go at you. (*Exits R.*)

CHARLIE (*ecstatic*) : Didn't mean it was f'r you ! You look grand !

BELLE (*a little suspicious*) : What d' yer give it to me for—exactly ?

CHARLIE : That ain't the only thing I'll give yer if you give me arf a chance.

BELLE : What d'yer mean ?

CHARLIE : Can't yer believe I'm gorn on yer ?

BELLE (*shyly*) : S'pose so. (*Meeting his ardent gaze*) Still, a gel's got t' be careful.

CHARLIE (*seriously*) : An' I want yer t' be an' all. (*Linking his arm in hers, looking down at her*) Well ?

BELLE (*looking up at him, a wistful smile on her face*) : Well ?

CHARLIE (*slipping his arm about her*) : Ain't yer goin' t' give us a kiss ?

BELLE (*making as if to draw away*) : Cooo . . . (*Suddenly throwing her head back and flinging her arms about him*) You're lovely. (*Hides her head against his chest.*)

[*Pause.*

CHARLIE (*tentatively*) : Yer do love us, don't yer ?

BELLE (*slightly mocking*) : I don't know. Do I ? (*Kisses him passionately, then extricates herself.*) My, nearly took me breath away. (*As he makes as if to again embrace her*) Go careful, now. You don't know who might come in.

CHARLIE (*taking her arm*) : Let 'em !

BELLE (*holding up her lips*) : Ain't you real ! It'll 'ave t' be a quick un, mind. (*They kiss.*) Billow ! (*He slews round towards R., she backs away laughing.*) Now you'd better be goin'. (*He looks rather downcast.*) You'll 'ave Mum after yer !

CHARLIE (*punching the air in his ecstasy*) : Think I care !

BELLE (*emphatic*) : But I do !

CHARLIE (*just as emphatic*) : I *want* t' see 'er. 'Ave to some time—if we're goin' t' walk out together.

BELLE (*laughing*) : Give a gel a chance ! I ain't said I really like yer yet.

CHARLIE (*seizing her arms*) : You don't 'ave to.

BELLE : My Gord, you don't think nothink of yourself !

CHARLIE (*snatching a kiss*) : Not arf as much as I do of you.

[SAM *enters R., and comes to a stand, amazed at the sight.*

SAM : Bruise me !

[BELLE *darts to door L.;* CHARLIE *turns a challenging gaze upon* SAM.

BELLE (*relieved*) : Aw, it's *you* ! (*To* CHARLIE) I wouldn't wait now if I was you. I'll meet yer presently.

CHARLIE (*showing excitement*) : You *are* comin' ?

BELLE (*laying a hand on his arm*) : I don't see why not. (*With a glance at* SAM, *who stands watching them, a grin on his face*) Only don't wait 'ere. You c'n come an' make it all right with Mum another time. Down the bottom. I'll try an' not be long. (*Gives him a radiant smile and runs off L.*)

SAM (*to* CHARLIE, *who turns towards door R.*) : A present f'r a good gel ?

CHARLIE (*halting beside him*) : Eh ?

SAM (*jerking his head towards L.*) : The kitten git-up, I was alludin' to.

CHARLIE (*eyeing him up and down*) : Is it any of your business ?

SAM (*coolly*) : I am in the family, yer know. (*Rocking on his feet, his hands in trousers pockets*) Yerce, I'm in the fam'ly.

CHARLIE (*pointedly*) : You'll be in a hambulance if you ain't f'r keepin' t' yer own affairs.

SAM (*with a lift of his eyebrows*) : You don't say so ! (*Placing his hand on* CHARLIE's *arm*) Do the fam'ly know you're 'ere ?

CHARLIE (*mockingly*) : S'pose so ; you're one of 'em.

SAM (*mock apologetic*) : Can't be orf, as they say in the clarsics. (*Goes to door L. and shouts*) Bill ! Annie ! 'Ere's a friend of yourn blowed in.

CHARLIE : Yer needn't shout 'im.

SAM (*returning*) : 'Ave a bloke call an' not give 'im 'og, dog, nor devil, time of day nor the

weather ! But p'r'aps your bringin' up was neglected ?

CHARLIE (*after they have studied each other in silence a moment*) : You got anythink else t' say ?

SAM : Me ? (*Grimacing*) No. (*Challenging*) 'Ave you ?

CHARLIE : Only this : keep yer nose in yer own glass, see ?

SAM : An' if I don't see me way like ?

CHARLIE : You'll see it less after I've done with yer.

SAM (*buttoning his jacket*) : An' when's this ?

CHARLIE : Some time convenient.

SAM : Course, I was f'rgittin', you've 'ad one or two scraps in a real ring, ain't yer ? Got a reputation, in fact. Well, I could do with pickin' up a point or two. Couldn't make it now, I s'pose ?

CHARLIE (*after glancing towards door L.*) : You think yourself up t' snuff,[1] don't yer ?

SAM (*threateningly*) : Do you !

BILL (*off R.*) : . . . after other people's . . .

ANNIE (*off R.*) : I 'ad t' wait till she come round ! (*Enters R. followed by* BILL ; CHARLIE *turns towards them.*) Now, then, young man, what might you be wantin' !

CHARLIE (*deferential*) : I was jest waitin' t' see yer, Ma. (*This is a set-back to them all.*)

ANNIE (*brusquely*) : Don't call me Ma. I can't abear the name.

CHARLIE : Sorry, Missus Collins . . . Ma . . . I mean . . .

ANNIE (*pointedly*) : An' what d'yer want with me ?

[1] Smart.

SAM : P'r'aps 'e wants t' take yer out square pushin', Annie !

ANNIE (*sharply, to Sam*) : I c'n see you there, with your eyes an' ears wide-o, so yer needn't trouble yerself t' make no remark. (SAM *looks resentment.*)

CHARLIE (*making a break*) : Look 'ere, Ma . . . Missus Collins . . . what've you got ag'in me goin' with Belle ?

BILL (*with a gasp*) : Stone a monkey yeller !

SAM (*to* BILL) : Aw, I tell yer, 'e's a star turn !

ANNIE (*angrily, to* SAM) : That's better than *giving* people a turn ! Bargin'[1] in on 'em clobbered[2] up like a winkle out of season. (*To* BILL) An' if you'd got so much to say, what d'yer come cryin' after me for ? (BILL *and* SAM *comfort each other in their discomfiture.*) Now, young man ! What've I got ag'in you goin' with my Belle ? Don't yer know ?

CHARLIE (*apologetic*) : I've been in trouble now an' ag'in, p'r'aps. Still, who ain't round 'ere ?

ANNIE (*smartly*) : I ain't, f'r one ! Nor Belle ain't. An', what's more, she won't if I c'n 'elp it. Now p'r'aps you understand why I don't want 'er an' you gittin' thick as thieves together ! (*He starts.*) Not that I want t' throw it up at yer, but there *is* yer past.

CHARLIE (*to the amusement of* SAM *and* BILL) : I c'n turn over a new leaf, can't I ?

ANNIE : It's news t' me if yer can. Must've 'ad a tidy-sized book t' start with. (SAM *guffaws.*)

CHARLIE (*after glaring at* SAM) : I only want a chance. That's all, Ma . . . Missus Collins—a chance.

ANNIE (*nodding*) : An' you think Belle's the chance you're needin' ?

CHARLIE (*very earnestly*) : I does an' all.

[1] Bursting. [2] Dressed.

ANNIE (*tight-lipped*) : What a dam' shame it is you'll 'ave t' go on thinkin'.

CHARLIE (*starting*) : You know 'ow it is, Ma . . . Missus Collins. You was young yerself.

ANNIE : It's not a bit of good you tryin' t' soft-soap me, young feller. I'm sorry, but I ain't t' be got over that way.

CHARLIE (*after a defiant glance at the pleased-looking* BILL *and* SAM ; *squaring his shoulders*) : Awright !

[BELLE *enters L. She has changed into the costume of the previous scene plus the fur coat, worn open.*

ANNIE (*her eyes widening at the sight of her*) : What ! Made up like a dog's dinner, ain't yer ? (*They all look at* BELLE, *who betrays surprise.*) Where d'yer think *you're* goin' ?

BELLE (*drawing coat around her, pert but nervous*) : Don't be so rude, Mum.

ANNIE (*pointing*) : That coat, where d'yer git it ? (*Pause.*) Or am I t' be asked t' believe as yer found it ?

BELLE : Course not. (*Posing.*) D'yer like me in it ? (ANNIE *does, but*) Charlie give it to me for a present.

ANNIE (*raising her eyebrows*) : Oh, nice of 'im, I'm sure. An' where'd 'e git it ?

SAM (*to* BILL, *who nods*) : Aha, as they say in Shykespeare.

CHARLIE (*glaring at* SAM) : 'E 'ad it *give* to 'im. Now, what've yer got t' say ?

SAM (*mockingly*) : An' you're 'avin' the vote of thanks printed an' published !

CHARLIE (*generally*) : A bloke I done a turn to some time ago was only too glad to do as much f'r me.

ANNIE (*to* SAM) : An' I'd like t' know what all

this as got t' do with you? In my opinion 'e ain't got a lot t' recommend 'im as a feller f'r Belle t' walk out with; but even you ain't got sich a ton of good points that a party could take yer for a-n'all-stand. So far as I c'n see, of course, I might be wrong, the only difference between youse is, she needn't 'ave nothink t' do with 'im, but she can't 'elp 'erself 'avin' you f'r a-nuncle. (*Emphatic*) So you c'n shut your trap.

SAM (*resentful*) : An' that's all the thanks a chap gits for comin' t' try an' do yer a turn !

BILL (*commiserating him*) : Aw, take no notice, Sam.

ANNIE (*to* BILL) : That's jest what *you'd* better do.

SAM (*moving towards door R.*) : The next time you want me t' do summink for yer . . .

ANNIE : I'll 'ave t' come an' bail yer out fust, likely as not.

SAM (*hesitating*) : Yer'd better be careful what yer say, I tell yer !

ANNIE : Aw, yus? An' is there anythink else you'd like t' tell me? If there is, you'd better git it orf yer chest . . . an' say good day.

[SAM *squares his shoulders, glares at* CHARLIE, *and exits R.*

ANNIE (*having watched him out; to* CHARLIE) : Now, young feller . . .

CHARLIE (*expectantly*) : Yerce, Ma . . . Missus Collins, I mean.

ANNIE : *You* give Belle that fur coat. What for?

CHARLIE : Because she told me last night she'd like one.

BELLE : Not in the way of askin' ! Don't think that, Mum !

ANNIE (*to* BELLE) : I'm beginning t' wonder what I 'ave got t' think along of you. What's 'e give yer it for? That's what *I* want t' know.

BELLE : To wear, of course !

ANNIE : Is *that* all ? You're *quite* sure ?

CHARLIE (*very earnestly*) : If you think I mean Belle any 'arm, Missus Collins, you've got it all wrong.

ANNIE : I only 'ope t' Gord I 'ave.

BELLE (*shame-faced*) : Aw, Mum, you *are* awful !

ANNIE (*angrily*) : You say *I'm* awful, yer saucy bitch, I'll take the skin orf yer ! (*menacing her.*) Jest you take that coat orf an' give it to 'im back. (BELLE *looks sullen defiance, and moves away.*) Be quick about it, now !

BILL (*loudly*) : You 'eard what yer mother said !

BELLE (*defiantly*) : What for ?

ANNIE : Because *I* say you've got to.

CHARLIE (*remonstrating*) : But it wasn't got on the cross,[1] Missus Collins ! May I never move from 'ere, it wasn't got on the cross !

BILL (*gesticulating*) : Make 'er give it back ! An' tell 'im t' clear out.

ANNIE (*quietly, to* BILL) : The young feller don't need t' be spoke to that way. (*Looking directly at* CHARLIE) If *'e* means decent be Belle, *'e'll* understand. (*To* BILL) That's more than *you* would, if I was t' git all I think printed black ag'inst white—and brought yer a light t' read it with.

BELLE : *'e* give me it. An' I ain't askin' 'im t' take it back, no matter what yer say.

ANNIE (*nonplussed*) : What kind of a gel d'yer take *yourself* t' be ?

BELLE : Not one above acceptin' a fur coat when it's orfered. (*An awkward pause.* BELLE *looks rebellious ;* ANNIE, *reproachful.*)

BILL (*to* ANNIE) : Why yer put up with it I don't know !

[1] By nefarious means.

[FRED ANNING *enters R.*

FRED (*to* ANNIE) : She's all right now, Missus Collins. (*Generally*) She was jest sayin' as 'ow the coach would 'old five comfortable, an' what a pity it was we 'adn't thought of askin' you t' foller—out of respect as well as f'r the ride—when orf she goes with a wallop at the foot of the stairs. Talk about turn ! Lucky she wasn't at the 'ead of 'em.

ANNIE (BELLE *and* CHARLIE *still engaging her mind*) : It's nice of yer t' think of me, Fred ; an' you tell Maggie that I take it jest as kind as if I 'ad been comin' to' see the last of the poor old gel.

FRED : Yus, all right. (*Moving quickly to chair downstage L.*) Well, I mustn't be long, or she'll be frettin' 'erself t' fevvers thinkin' I'll be late for the funeral. (*Seats himself.*) Come on, Bill ! Pull yer socks up ! Make me chivvy look like Sunday.

BILL (*to* ANNIE, *indicating* BELLE *and* CHARLIE) : What about *them*, an' that there ?

ANNIE (*nodding at* FRED) : Is it everybody's business ? (*Looking at* BELLE *and* CHARLIE) We're goin' inside t' see 'ow we stand about things.

BILL (*astonished*) : What ! You're goin' t' let the likes of 'im . . .

FRED : Come on, Bill !

BELLE (*to* ANNIE) : If givin' back the coat's what . . .

ANNIE : There's more than that t' talk about, it seems. (BELLE *turns and exits L.* ; CHARLIE *hesitates.*) Come on, young feller. (CHARLIE *and* ANNIE *exit L.*)

BILL (*dumbfounded*) : Well, of all . . . (*Snatching up towel*) " I'm dam'd if I know !

[*During the ensuing dialogue* BILL *is shaving* FRED.

FRED : What I like about your old woman, Bill, is she don't mind what she does, do she ?

BILL (*annoyed*) : No, she dam' well don't.

FRED : Yerce, she mightn't be all anyone could wish for . . . Still, 'ow many of 'em are ?

[BILL *mumbles an imprecation.*

FRED : She's a blinkin' brick . . . all the same.

BILL (*suspending operations a moment*) : So that's 'ow she strikes *you,* is it ?

FRED : Speak as yer find, that's what I say.

BILL : You didn't find 'er, that's why.

FRED (*at a loss*) : Aw, I don't know . . .

BILL : Then wait till yer do, see !

[*Pause.*

FRED (*tentatively*) : Somethink upset yer this mornin', Bill ?

BILL : What if it 'as ? It's me it's upset, ain't it ? (*Pause.*) You don't know arf what I 'ave t' put up with, you don't. If you're so blasted took with 'er, it's a pity yer can't 'ave 'er.

FRED (*wiping his face on towel before mirror*) : I s'pose we all see somethink in other people's missuses we can't find in our own.

BILL : You ought t' 'ave more sympathy, then.

[CHARLIE *enters L. with a quart jug. He passes quickly across to R. and exits.* BILL *watches him, amazed.*

BILL (*to* FRED) : Would yer believe it ! Would yer believe it !

FRED (*casually, as he searches his pocket for money*) : What ?

BILL : 'E's got round '*er* ! Swelp me Gord if 'e ain't got round 'er ! (*Takes money from* FRED.)

FRED (*with a laugh*) : 'E's done what *you* can't do, any'ow.

[*Exits R.* SAM *enters R.*

SAM (*gesticulating*) : 'Ere, *'e* just passed me with a jug !

BILL : I know !

SAM : But what's it mean ?

BILL : Jug means beer, don't it ? *'Im* with a jug means 'e's got round 'er.

[CHARLIE *re-enters R. with jug of beer. He glances superciliously at them as he moves quickly across and exits L.*

SAM : Gor bly . . . 'E might 've bought the blasted place !

BILL (*licking his lips*) : Ah, yer might well say so. But 'e ain't. There's goin' t' be an alteration 'ere. You might think I ain't master in me own place, but . . . (*He stops at sound of* ANNIE'S *voice.*)

ANNIE (*off L.*) : No later than ten, mind ! (CHARLIE *and* BELLE *enter L., followed by* ANNIE.) An' it all depends 'ow you go on this time whether you go out together ag'in.

CHARLIE (*pleased*) : I'll take good care of 'er, Ma . . . Missus Collins.

BELLE (*archly*) : I'll see you do an' all. (CHARLIE *and* BELLE *exit R., followed by* ANNIE.)

SAM (*to* BILL) : Well, why didn't yer say summink ?

BILL : Say ? . . . What's the good ? My time'll come. You'll see ! (ANNIE *re-enters L.*)

ANNIE (*with a sigh*) : Didn't she look fine ? I reckon she'll find the coat a bit 'ot f'r 'er in this sun.

SAM : I s'pose yer know they've got someone f'r the jeweller's job[1] in 'Igh Street ?

ANNIE (*with a sigh of relief*) : That's a load orf me mind, any'ow. No, we ain't 'eard. Who've they got ?

[1] Burglary.

SAM : A couple of the Dowsett 'eads.

ANNIE : Oh, yes.

SAM : Chinas[1] of the bloke what's jest gorn out with Belle.

ANNIE (*with a guilty start*) : What . . . what d'yer mean be that ?

SAM (*with a shrug*) : Aw, nothink. Thought I'd mention it, that's all.

BILL (*gesticulating*) : Now yer see what you've gorn an' done !

ANNIE : What d'yer mean ! If I 'adn't let 'er go with 'im she'd 've only took the first chance of meetin' 'im unbeknownst t' me. P'r'aps now she thinks I don't mind nothink'll 'appen. Give fruit ain't so sweet, but it's more safe like.

BILL : S'posin' 'e's mixed up in this 'ere jeweller's bust ? (ANNIE *starts.*) You've gorn an' done summink now, you 'ave !

ANNIE (*terribly worried*) : What I've done I've done f'r the best.

SAM : Of course, I don't say 'e is concerned in it . . .

ANNIE : No ; *you* don't. (*Hotly*) Why the 'ell couldn't you 'ave told me while 'e was 'ere ?

SAM : 'Ow was I t' know you didn't know already ?

ANNIE : Or what d'yer want t' tell me at all for ?

SAM : An', besides, I ain't been suffocated with thanks f'r tryin' t' do yer turns in the past.

ANNIE : It's a nice turn you're doin' me now, I must say. Shovin' things in me mind so as I'll be all on pins an' needles f'r the rest of the day. (*Glaring at* BILL) If I'd got a man as was a

[1] Friends.

man, it wouldn't be left f'r me to always do the tellin' orf of people. What's done *is* done, I s'pose.

BILL (*after glancing at* SAM) : She gits 'erself mixed up in a dam'd orrible mess or summink, she don't come back 'ere. An', whatever 'appens, *you* won't be able t' blame me.

ANNIE : I've been waitin' t' 'ear summink like that from you, yer lousy specimen ! You say it ag'in to-day, an' I won't be answerable f'r what I'll do t' yer. True as Gord's me judge, I won't. (*More to herself than to either of the others*) You do things f'r the best . . . an' . . . I'm dam'd if I know. Soon as I said she could go, I knew, some'ow, I'd done wrong.

BILL : If you knew you'd done wrong, what d'yer do it for ?

ANNIE : Why the 'ell couldn't you 'ave got rid of Charlie Stubbs yerself ? No, you must bring me into it to do the wrong thing. So as if anythink do go wrong you c'n 'arp on it. It'll be many a long day before she gits round me ag'in. . . .

SAM (*sympathising with her*) : We're all born, but we ain't all buried. Likely as not you're worryin' yerself over nothink. P'r'aps nothink'll 'appen to 'er at all. Yer never know.

ANNIE (*with a heavy sigh*) : That's the dam'd pity of it. I shan't, likely as not, till it's too late.

[BILL *and* SAM *exchange meaning looks as* ANNIE *turns and hurries out L.*

CURTAIN

The living-room behind Bill's shop.

TIME : *Evening. About three weeks have elapsed.*

SCENE : *Upstage, centre, a large dresser, bearing an assortment of cheap crockery and odds and ends of a domestic nature, prominent amongst which is Bill's very worn bowler hat.*

To left of dresser, a door giving on to scullery. Slightly more than half-way downstage in left wall, a door communicating via a passage with the street door.

Right, centre, a fireplace, with above, an ornate overmantel, with cheap ornaments, artificial flowers, etc., and an alarum clock.

Centre, a deal table covered by a washed-out red cloth. A rag rug lies before fire ; and oilcloth covers the floor.

The room looks untidy, as though it has not been efficiently "put straight" for some time, but on no account is it to appear dirty. Gas lighting.

When curtain rises, BILL *is discovered seated in a Windsor armchair right of table poring over an evening paper, making out a sum on its margin with a short stub of pencil, which he moistens with his mouth before each entry. He is in his shirt-sleeves ; his coat is hanging on back of chair. At the opposite end of table is an ordinary Windsor chair, and others of the same variety happen accidentally about the room.*

[*Knocking heard.*

BILL (*cocking his head to listen*) : 'Er I s'pose. (*Resumes workout sum on margin of paper.*) Let's see : 'arf-a-crown each way at tens . . . (*refers to racing items*) . . . yus, tens. Ten arves an' me own 'un back. . . . Twenny-sev'n an' a kick.[1] A third a the odds . . . that's eight an' fourpence . . . (*Knocking repeated.*) Use yer blasted key, can't

[1] Sixpence.

yer ! . . . An' me own tenpence makes nine an' tuppence. That's . . . thirty-six an' eightpence all told. (*Rubs his hands in anticipation of the pleasure in store for them. Knocking again heard.*) What she think a key's for ? (*Suddenly*) P'r'aps 'tain't 'er ! (*Rises and, after first placing paper under cushion of Windsor chair, exits L. off*) Aw . . . it's you !

SAM (*off*) : Took long ernough comin' t' the door !

BILL (*re-entering L.*) : Shut it after yer. (*Door slammed off.*)

SAM (*sauntering in L.*) : D'yer think it was the bloke f'r the dook-a-Kent,[1] or what ? (*Strikes attitude R. of table ; hands deep in trouser pockets, legs well apart, and body thrown back.*) Well, what did I tell yer ?

BILL (*his tone making the speech contradictory*) : Am *I* grousin', am I ?

SAM (*setting his check cap at a more rakish angle*) : You ! I'm the feller as ought t' grouse. Give yer a cert, an' yer put a measely 'arf-a-dollar on it. Think Solly Joel made 'e's beer-money that way ?

BILL (*pointing*) : 'Arf-a-dollar each way, don't forget !

SAM (*grimacing*) : Forget ! Yer don't think I got another punter as takes the risk you do ?

BILL : I ain't Ford or Rockyfeller, am I ?

SAM (*admonitory*) : A gamble's a gamble ; I draws the line at finance. Yer know very well it was a cert. (BILL *shakes his head*). I told yer !

BILL : Wouldn't 've been the fust time yer said so an' it didn't come orf.

SAM (*annoyed*) : It's come orf, ain't it ?

BILL : Yus, but it mightn't 've.

[1] Rent.

SAM : There yer go, there yer go ! Lookin' a gift 'orse in the snout ag'in. (*Watching* BILL *narrowly*) Eights an' all.

BILL (*galvanised into action, producing paper*) : What d'yer mean, eights ? (*Pushing paper at* SAM) There's what it is !

SAM (*simulating surprise*) : What, ain' tit eights ? (*Takes paper and glances perfunctorily at it.*)

BILL (*louder*) : *You* know dam' well it's tens !

SAM (*tossing paper aside on table*) : I knew ! 'Ow d'yer mean ? (*Simulating anger*) What the 'ell would I say eights for if I knew it was tens ?

BILL : In case I never dropped yer nothink f'r giving us a tip as come 'ome f'r once.

SAM (*pityingly*) : Gor bly, what a mind yer got.

BILL : Never mind what I've got, I ain't got me winnin's.

SAM (*shifting his cap about on his head*) : 'E must 've got mixed up over the two meetin's or summink.

BILL : That don't intitle 'im t' get mixed up payin' me out. I want me doos, an' all as I want's me doos, then I don't care.

SAM : Crimes, yer don't think your measely 'arf-a-dollar each way the only bees-an' 'oney[1] I 'andles, do yer ?

BILL : 'Tis of mine !

SAM (*casually*) : There's been a mistake, that's all.

BILL : What's that t' do with me ? I won ; an' I want what I won.

SAM : I tell yer I've been paid out eights. Wait till t'morrer till I see the bloke. (*Airily*) It'll be all right.

BILL (*extending his palm*) : Give us what yer 'ave got. You c'n owe us the rest.

[1] Money.

[SAM, *a faint smile on his face, produces from his pocket the proceeds of* BILL'S *bet wrapped in paper.*

SAM (*offering it tentatively*) : Why not 'ave it all on Staggerin' On in the big 'un t'morrer ?

BILL (*snatching money*) : I c'n think about t'morrer when I got what I won t'day. (*Door slams off L. ; and he hurriedly pockets money and hides paper as before.*) If that's 'er, say nothink about this, see ? (*Taps pocket.*)

SAM (*nodding assent*) : Course. Any news of the kid ?

BILL : What d'yer expect ? (ANNIE *enters L. as from street, looking tired and careworn.*) Well ?

SAM (*to* ANNIE) : 'Allo, gel !

ANNIE (*pulling her dowdy hat off*) : 'Ello, Sam. (*Drops into Windsor chair hat in hand.*) My, ain't it 'ot ! (*Fans herself with hat.*)

SAM (*briskly*) : Lovely drop of weather f'r the time of the year. (BILL *watches* ANNIE *furtively from upstage of table.*) 'Ad any luck ?

ANNIE (*bitterly*): Luck ! No. Gord, ain't London a place t' try an' find somebody in ! Once or twice I thought I spotted 'er in the distance like . . . (*rising wearily to her feet*) . . . but no. (*Goes and hangs hat on nail in door L.*) Dam' little cuss ! (*Returning*) They got Ella Shields at the Hempire next week, I see. (*Leans on table for support and inspects the soles of her boots.*) Reckon after all the runnin' about I've done this last couple of weeks I'll want a new pair of daisies.[1]

BILL (*complaining*) : Another 'arf-a-bar[2] chucked away ! An' what for ? Nothink.

ANNIE (*with a flash of spirit*) : Don't *you* worry yer lousy self. I expect I c'n find the money t' pay for 'em . . . (*turning towards scullery*) . . . same as I alwers done.

[BILL *moves down and towards fireplace, and by*

[1] Abbreviation of "daisy-roots"—boots. [2] Ten shillings.

signs tries to impress SAM *with the need of his remaining silent about the bet.*

ANNIE (*looking through scullery doorway*) : What, ain't yer washed the breakfast things up ? (*Looking round at* BILL) My Gord, if you ain't mean. (*Snatches dingy apron from off nail in scullery door.*)

BILL (*doggedly*) : I forgot.

ANNIE (*skinning herself of her costume jacket*) : What would yer do with 'im. (*Hangs jacket under hat L., and ties apron about her waist.*)

BILL : Ain't I 'ad ernough t' do ; gittin' me own grub as I could an' lookin' after the shop ?

ANNIE : I left it already cooked f'r yer. You only 'ad t' eat it.

BILL : Insurance bloke's been.

ANNIE (*turning when about to enter scullery*) : D'yer pay 'im ?

BILL : 'E's callin' back to-morrer. I didn't know where yer kept the book.

ANNIE (*scornfully*) : *You* didn't know ! (*Gesticulating*) Ain't it alwers be'ind the tea-caddy on the shelf there ? *You* didn't know. No, what you wasn't sure of was whether you was goin' t' git the money back orf me or not. (*Waving her hand in direction of scullery*) You lined yer guts all right. You knew 'ow t' do that.

BILL : 'Ave I got t' starve because your fool ernough t' go trapesin' after yer pretty daughter what's gone whorin' ?

ANNIE (*striding to table*) : You 'old your tongue about 'er ! D'yer 'ear, 'old your tongue. (*Tapping table with her clenched fist*) You don't know no more than me *what* she's doin'. (*Her voice cracks.*) What a grand feller you'd come t' think yourself, with 'er layin' at the bottom of the river likely as not.

SAM (*shuddering*) : 'Ere, 'old it up, Annie ? What's she got t' go an' drown 'erself over ?

ANNIE : Because things ain't worked out the same as she thought p'r'aps. I don't know. More than once the last few weeks I've thought *I* might do worser than make an 'ole in the water somewhere. I'm that tired . . . (*Wipes her palm down her face.*) When I'm out trapesin' the street for 'er I keep all on thinkin' I ought t' be 'ome—case she was t' come in and found me out and went away ag'in—an' when I'm 'ome 'ere I get took with the idea that I still ought t' be out lookin'. It's a 'orrable feelin'. Like your alwers somewhere yer shouldn't be. (*Hurries into scullery and slams door to.*)

BILL (*evading* SAM's *glance*) : Ain't it fair !

SAM : I've never see 'er so cast down. In a manner of speakin', till now a steamroller could've 'it old Annie an' she'd 've come up smilin'.

BILL : Don't say nothink about . . . (*Taps his pocket.*) You know !

SAM (*rather disgusted*) : Aw . . all right.

BILL (*clutching* SAM's *arm*) : An' that there few bob I've got t' come . . . (SAM's *face brightens.*) . . . you c'n stick . . .

SAM (*mildly repudiating what he thinks is an offer of a tip*) : No, no . . .

BILL (*insistent*) : Yus. You c'n stick it on Staggerin' On, like you said, f'r the big 'un to-morrer.

SAM (*disappointed*) : Oh, can I ? All right. (*Knocking off L.*) Who's that, I wonder ? (*Neither of them show the least inclination to answer the door.*) Someone.

ANNIE (*issuing from scullery, wiping her steaming hands on her apron*) : It was a knock I 'eard ? (BILL *and* SAM *nod. She crosses to L., turning.*) This

do 'appen t' be 'er, don't say nothink, see ! You do there'll be trouble. Treat 'er same as if she'd never been away. (*Exits L.*)

BILL (*sneering*) : That's the way she is all the time. Never a knock comes t' the door but it must be Belle. Pah !

ANNIE (*off*) : Come in, my dear. No. No luck. (*Door shuts off.*)

MAGGIE (*off, approaching*) : Oh, Missus Collins, you don't say ! (*Enters, followed by* ANNIE, MAGGIE ANNING, *a rather thin woman in the middle thirties, of medium height, clad in black, her tea-time sober tidiness, with a washed-out print apron tied about her waist.*) I *am* sorry. (*Turning a mournful look on the men*) Evenin', Mister Collins. 'Ow are yer, Sam ? (*They nod.*) I was in the front room, jest a-waterin' the plant, when I see yer come in. (*Clasps her hands at her stomach and nods.*) Fred was in the kitchen soakin' 'e's feet. It's a fair licker 'ow them two kids of mine enjoy seein' 'im soakin' 'e's feet. It's a knock-out 'ow this weather plays 'em up an' all—that, an' bein' on 'em so much. (ANNIE *nods.*) " Missus Collins is back," I went through an' told 'im. " I *must* go across an' ask 'er what she's seen or 'eard of Belle," I says. " Give the woman a chance t' git in an' settle 'erself," 'e says. As though I *would* come flyin' across right away ! (*Glances round at chair L. of table.*) An' you ain't 'eard ? (ANNIE *shakes her head.*) Nor you ain't seen nothink ? (ANNIE *ditto.*) Oh, I am sorry.

ANNIE : Set down. You ain't in no 'urry, are yer ?

MAGGIE : Well, I didn't ought . . . (*Sits L. of table.*) Still, f'r a minute or two, p'r'aps.

[*An awkward pause ensues.*

SAM (*with an effort*) : I . . . I think I'll be gettin' along. (MAGGIE *gives him a sorrowful look.*) Yerce, I think I will. (*To* ANNIE) Cheer up, old gel !

The kid'll . . . well, you know ! (*They all stare at him.*) She's got 'er 'ead screwed on all right, an' . . . an', well, she's bound t' fall on 'er feet, see ?

Annie (*with a bitter smile*) : Yer mean well, no doubt, but what yer say amounts t' jest nothink at all.

Sam : What I mean t' say . . . well, what *is* there t' say ? You're bound t' see 'er back ag'in sometime, safe an' sound an' as large as life.

Annie (*bitterly*) : So long as she ain't large *with* life. (Maggie *heaves a mournful sigh ;* Sam *and* Bill *exchange glances.*) But, 'owever she is, I want 'er back. Nothink else don't matter. She's all I've got. (*Viciously*) I could flay the silly little bitch alive when I think of the dance she's led me.

Maggie : Of course, you've 'eard as 'ow 'e's been let go ?

Bill (*starting*) : What, Charlie Stubbs ?

[Maggie *nods.*

Annie : No ! They've let 'im go ! After all the trouble 'e's brought on us.

Sam : They didn't nick 'im f'r that.

Maggie (*with lugubrious relish*); Fred come 'ome full of it. The others were sentenced, but there wasn't ernough evidence ag'inst 'im. So they said. You'd 've thought the police could've made a much better job of it than that. (*To* Sam) 'Tis the Sessions where they was brought up, ain't it ?

Sam (*resentful of being referred to*) : Bill's got the evenin' paper. It might be in there.

[Bill *looks angrily at* Sam. Annie *surprises* Bill's *look, and a hard, set expression takes possession of her face.* Sam *takes paper from under cushion and searches through it for the item required.*

Annie (*looking directly at* Bill) : Oh, so Bill's

got the evenin' paper, 'as 'e ! Only t' see 'ow Charlie Stubbs got on, I suppose !

BILL (*uneasily*) : I . . . I was in*te*rested like. (*Snappily*) Got reason t' be, ain't I ?

SAM (*having found and read item*) : Mrs. Annin's got about the strength of it. (*Tosses paper on table, whence it is snatched up and read by* MAGGIE.) Jest gives the case 'orrable mention, as they say.

ANNIE (*who has not taken her eyes off* BILL) : So you are in*te*rested in yer pretty daughter after all ! No one would've thought so goin' by all you've said an' done since she went away. *You* was in*te*rested like. Like what ? Like 'ell, I s'pose ! Trade's been that quiet you've never seen the like. (SAM *studies his feet ;* BILL *looks at his wife from under his brows, his head bent ;* MAGGIE, *having finished reading and placed paper on table, is obviously enjoying herself after her ghoulish manner.*) That's what I've been told every time I've come 'ome from trapesin' my feet orf all day after 'er. (*Turning on* SAM, *who simulates surprise*) It's a hill wind, they say, what blows no one no good, an' *you* ain't been doin' so blasted bad f'r me bein' out of the place so much, I lay long odds you ain't.

SAM (*indignant*) : What d'yer mean ?

BILL : Tell yer I got the paper t' see 'ow Charlie Stubbs got on.

ANNIE (*turning on him*) : You're a dam' liar !

SAM (*loudly indignant*) : Ain't done so bad ! Bought streets of 'ouses with the money I've took orf of 'im, I 'ave.

ANNIE (*to* BILL, *ignoring* SAM's *interpolation*) : Yer a dam' liar. If you'd seen about Charlie Stubbs in the paper, 'ow was it that what Missus Annin' said come t' yer with sich a shock ? Wasn't you took back as much as I was at 'earin' 'e'd got orf ? Say any diff'rent, an' I'll chuck summink at yer.

BILL : All right, all right ! I'm a dam' liar. What're you ?

ANNIE (*moving along up side of table, he moves along down side in order to keep it between them*) : Talk t' me, yer dam'd . . .

BILL (*shouting*) : What're you ? Ain't the first duty of a wife t' be a wife ? An' where's a wife's place ? In 'er 'ome, ain't it ? Is it bein' a wife t' let yer old man go an' scratch f'r 'e's grub the best way 'e can, while you're out racin' round after a gel as left 'er 'ome of her own accord—of 'er own accord, mind yer !—t' go an' . . . an' . . .

ANNIE (*freeing her elbows of her tucked-up blouse-sleeves*) : Yer better be careful, mind !

MAGGIE (*tucking her folded hands into her meagre stomach*) : It ain't f'r me t' put my spoke in, p'r'aps, an' no doubt it'll be said so to me face, but—there's a mother's feelin's, Mister Collins.

ANNIE : Yer might jest as well haddress yer remarks t' stone, my dear, as t' try an' move 'im to a bit of right thinkin'.

MAGGIE (*swallowing an imaginary plum*) : Then all I says is, more's the pity. She is 'e's daughter, an' . . . .

BILL : That's what all the rest of the dam' fools say.

MAGGIE (*stiffening on her seat*) : If yer wants t' cast infrigeratin' remarks at me, Mister Collins, I'll thank yer t' keep 'em f'r me 'usban'.

BILL (*having got his second wind*) : She's your daughter, they say. Blimey, don't I know ? D'yer think she's been 'avin' sleepless nights over me ? Not 'er. What've I got put out over 'er for then ? She's my daughter ! Well, ain't I 'er father ? There's more up t' me than's up to 'er, I s'pose ? She ain't s'posed to 'ave no feelin's f'r me, yut I'm s'posed t' break me 'eart

over 'er. Where's the fairation of it? Will yer . . . any of yer, tell me? There ain't none. Not a-natom. I'd go trapesin' the West End day in an' day out I would! I'd . . .

SAM (*out to placate* ANNIE) : You can't blame 'er mother doin' it, though. As Missus Annin' said, a mother's feelin's an' that.

BILL : A mother's feelin's! A mother's feelin's ought t' be in 'er ands. If she'd knocked 'ell out of Belle, 'stead of lettin' 'er come it so much, this would never've 'appened; an' I wouldn't 've been looked at out of the corner of everybody's eye along of 'avin' a gel as 'ad gorn on the loose.

ANNIE (*sharply*) : 'Ave yer finished, 'ave yer?

MAGGIE : If you ask me, Mister Collins . . .

BILL : I don't ask nobody what I think.

MAGGIE (*swallowing hard*) : Then I say nothink.

ANNIE : Take no notice of 'im, my dear. 'E's like all the rest of the men : talks as 'e's belly guides 'im.

BILL (*glaring at each of them in turn*) : I don't talk as if I'd been workin' in a bong-bong fact'ry, any'ow. As if I'd snaffled a cheap read at the favours or summink. A mother's feelin's! Your daughter! Where's my coat! (*Makes move to get it, but hesitates, his eye on* ANNIE.) I'm orf out of this.

ANNIE : You'd better. You'd better. (*Snatches his jacket from back of chair; he prepares to dodge.*) Aw, you needn't think I'm goin' t' touch yer. I ain't got a stick long ernough." (*Throws jacket in his face.*) There's yer coat. Now git out.

[*He has frenziedly struggled into his jacket, and has his arms free at the right moment to catch his bowler hat, which she has snatched from dresser and flung at him.*

BILL (*glaring at* ANNIE *as he tears door L. open*) : You . . . you . . . wait. (*To* SAM) Yer comin' ? (*Exits hurriedly L.*)

ANNIE (*to* SAM) : Gor on, go an' 'elp 'im t' git rid of the rest of the day's takin's.

SAM (*resentful*) : Look 'ere, Annie . . .

ANNIE (*tired*) : Don't talk t' me. (*Her voice breaks a little.*) The less I 'ear an' see of yer the better I'll be pleased. You're a dam good pair.

SAM (*starting*) : Bly . . . Annie ! (*Implying that talk in this instance would be futile*) Awright.

BILL (*off*) : Ain't yer comin' ?

SAM (*after turning towards L.*) : You ain't got no reason t' 'ave a down on me, you ain't. Who give yer the wire Belle was with the Stubbs feller fust go off ? Who tried t' put 'im out of mess ? All on your account ! But still . . .

[*Turns away with a shrug and exits L.* ANNIE *stands for a moment stock still, looking fixedly before her. Then, slowly, her head droops, her hands clench and unclench convulsively, and she turns her head away in a vain attempt to hide her tears from* MAGGIE. *Suddenly she drops on chair L. of table and, resting her mouth against her closed fist, gives herself up to her tears.*

MAGGIE (*lugubriously*) : Oh, Missus Collins !

ANNIE (*brokenly, as she wipes the tears from her face with her palm*) : I . . . I . . . I'll be . . . all . . . awright in a minute.

MAGGIE (*comforting her*) : You poor soul ! 'Ave a good cry. Don't mind me. It'll ease yer. It's as good as a meal to a sad 'eart, a good cry.

ANNIE (*after a pause ; dashing her hand across her eyes*) : I 'ad 'er 'ere, I'd Belle 'er ! I'd tan 'er till she didn't know where 'er be'ind 'ung. Goin' orf an' leavin' me . . . Not that I mind that so much. But, after trustin' her, t' let me down in front of everyone. I wouldn't care if I 'adn't

alwers done me best by 'er ! (*Pause.*) Lot of good me talkin'. (*Glancing at* MAGGIE) I wonder what 'e done with the paper ? Took it with 'im, I s'pose. (MAGGIE *pushes it towards her.*) I don't want t' read it. Let Charlie Stubbs show 'e's face 'ere ! I'll Charlie 'im ! What the 'ell they want t' take 'im for if they 'ad t' let 'im go. Seems t' me someone round 'ere was tryin' t' mix it for 'im. They've mixed it f'r me all right. The louse-bound lot they are. What's the good of talkin'.

MAGGIE : It do seem 'ard, 'orrable 'ard, t' bring a gel up t' Belle's age an' then 'ave 'em go wrong. (*Quickly, as* ANNIE *shows resentment*) That's s'posin' she 'as ; which I 'ope an' trust she ain't. It makes me wonder when I look at me own two. If I thought they'd go the same way, I don't know 'ardly what I'd do. It would be as if I'd nussed a serpint in me bosom. (*Pause.*) An' she was alwers sich a credit to 'yer, Belle was. The sight of 'er was fair warmin' some'ow. (*Tearfully*) Old auntie, Gord rest 'er soul, often used t' say so. What would she think of it all, poor old gel, if only she could rise out of her grave an' see ? 'Pon me soul, we never see the end of trouble, what with one thing an' another. I blame the war for a lot of it, I do. Old auntie was never the same after it. What with the hair-raids an' the destitute foods we got to eat. You couldn't wonder 'er inside was ruined. (*Cries quietly.*) Oh, my poor aunt ! Oh, my poor aunt !

ANNIE (*wiping her face thoroughly on her apron*) : 'Ere ! 'Ere, you're a nice 'un t' come an' cheer a party up, I must say. You wanted t' snivvel, yer might've 'ad the decency t' 'ave stopped over in yer own place an' done it. I've got ernough trouble without 'avin' other people's brought in to me.

MAGGIE (*wiping her eyes on her apron*) : You

talkin' so feelin' like of Belle brought old auntie up like a lump in me throat.

ANNIE : What's the good of mixing up the dead and the livin' ? After all, you can't expect the old 'uns t' go on livin' f'r ever, specially when they ain't so well in the 'ead. (MAGGIE *looks grieved.*) If we only knew the Almighty's idea about it, we might think twice before we kept all on moanin' an' groanin' over them as live to a good age before they're took. With Belle it's different. She's alive ; at least, I 'ope an' pray t' Gord she is. (*Rising to her feet*) As to 'er goin' orf like she done, I suppose I can't blame 'er altogether. In a way, if I'd 've give way t' my feelin's when I was 'er age, an' studied nobody but meself, I might've done the same.

MAGGIE (*shocked*) : Oh, Missus Collins !

ANNIE (*aspersively*) : Yerce, an' you wasn't sich a saint before yer got married, so far as I remember.

MAGGIE (*tactfully, as she thinks*) : Times was diff'rent then.

ANNIE : Gels wasn't ; not a lot. Then they thought a lot of what they'd like t' do if they dared ; now there's nothink they daresn't do if they like. If there's any more thinkin' t' be done it's left t' their parents to do. Aw, well, this won't git the place put t' rights.

MAGGIE (*tentatively*) : Can I give yer a bit of a 'and ?

ANNIE (*decisively*) : You can't. I've told yer more than once I wouldn't 'ave another pair of 'ands doin' things 'ere.

MAGGIE : I *am* sorry I spoke !

ANNIE (*inviting contradiction*): Where no 'arm's meant where's the occasion for same t' be took ?

MAGGIE (*with a weak smile*) : Of course, if you . . .

ANNIE (*pointedly*) : Don't let *me* 'urry you away.

[MAGGIE *rises in dudgeon, and is about to make suitable retort and exit, when door L. opens and* CHARLIE STUBBS *slips in, closing door carefully behind him.*

MAGGIE : Aw, my !

ANNIE (*starting at the sight*) : You !

CHARLIE (*removing his cap*) : I knocked !

[MAGGIE *resumes her seat.*

ANNIE : What're you doin' 'ere ?

CHARLIE (*amiably*) : Door was on a jar. (*Looking from one to the other*) No one come, so I walked in. Nothink up, is there ?

ANNIE (*regaining her poise*) : Don't yer think you've got a blasted sauce ?

MAGGIE : Ah . . .

CHARLIE (*taken aback*) : I tell yer I knocked !

ANNIE : Darin' t' show yer ugly dial in 'ere, after all the trouble yer brought on us ! *You* with the broad arrers 'ardly out of yer system, as yer might say.

CHARLIE (*resentful*) : 'Ere, don't come it. I wouldn't be 'ere if I 'ad anythink ag'inst me. I was knocked orf f'r summink I never done ; see ? F'r once, the information wasn't straight-away. I'm innocent, they know that ; that's why I 'ad t' be let go. I've been give a chance to ; an' I'm goin' t' take it an' all. You'll see, if only I can fix things the way I've figured.

ANNIE : You ain't come 'ere just to tell me that ?

CHARLIE : Come 'ere t' tell you nuthink. Belle about ?

ANNIE : Well, of all the . . . What's where she is got t' do with you ?

CHARLIE : Crimes, you ain't arf got a neck !

ANNIE : I got a neck ?

CHARLIE : Of course Belle's t' do with me. We

fixed things, me an' er did, in the pictures, the day I got wiped up.

ANNIE (*uncertain the best course to pursue*) : Oh . . . So yer fixed things in the pictures, did yer ? What things ?

CHARLIE (*embarrassed*) : About 'er likin' me same as I do 'er.

ANNIE : An' what about me ?

MAGGIE : You've took the very words out of me mouth, me dear.

[ANNIE *frowns at her.*

ANNIE : I don't count, I s'pose ?

CHARLIE : Oh, yerce yer do. See, I reckoned as soon as you see we was cut out f'r each other, me an' Belle, I mean, you'd be strong f'r me an' all. That's where you come in.

ANNIE : Oh, I do, do I ? Then jest yer let me tell yer you're dead out in yer reckoning.

CHARLIE : Oh ! Who says ?

ANNIE (*tapping her breast*) : I do. An' if yer wait 'ere f'r a week you won't see 'er ; so you c'n go somewhere where they'd rather yer comp'ny than yer room.

CHARLIE : What for ?

MAGGIE : What for !

ANNIE : What for ?

MAGGIE (*ignoring* ANNIE's *gesture bidding her be silent*) : As if *you* don't know !

CHARLIE (*looking from one to the other*) : Know what ?

ANNIE (*loudly*) : Never you mind what.

CHARLIE (*alarmed*) : No 'arm's come to 'er ? She ain't dead or nothink ?

MAGGIE (*quickly*) : As if you don't know she

ain't been 'ome since she went away with yer that day.

ANNIE (*breathless with anger at the disclosure*) : There !

[MAGGIE *quails before her blazing look.*

CHARLIE (*starting*) : Ain't been 'ome ? (*Looking at them in turn*) Ain't been 'ome, d'yer say ?

ANNIE (*stridently, to* MAGGIE) : What's it got t' do with you, Maggie 'Awkins, as was ? Couldn't you 'ave kep' yer dam' mouth shut ? An' left things t' them as're t' do with 'em ? No, yer must go puttin' your both feet in a puddle what don't belong t' yer.

MAGGIE (*helplessly*) : 'Ow was I t' know ?

ANNIE (*remorseless*) : You wasn't s'posed to. What I can see of it, there ain't much goes on in this turnin' escapes you, with yer Gord-f'rsaken plant in the winder what wants ever-lastin' waterin'.

CHARLIE (*as though dazed*) : Ain't been 'ome . . .

MAGGIE (*jumping to her feet*) : If ever I enter this 'ouse ag'in . . .

ANNIE : Don't let it worry yer ; yer won't.

[MAGGIE *marches off in high dudgeon. Immediately afterwards the street door is violently slammed to.*

CHARLIE (*terribly moved, dropping into chair L.*) : Ain't been . . . (*To* ANNIE, *who has slammed door L. to after* MAGGIE's *exit*) But *why* ain't Belle been 'ome ?

ANNIE (*angrily*) : What's the good of you askin' me ? Ashamed of 'erself, I shouldn't wonder. I've got a lot, a 'ell of a lot, t' thank you for, young man.

CHARLIE (*emotionally*) : Yerce . . . but . . . Ma, Missus Collins, I never meant Belle no 'arm. Belle ! Why, she could've 'ad my breakfast any time. That's the way she's got me.

ANNIE (*cupping her elbows in her palms*) : You better git up out of that, an' 'op it.

CHARLIE : D'yer think . . .

ANNIE (*vehemently*) : What the blasted 'ell am I t' think ? I ain't laid eyes on 'er since she went orf with you that day. (*Pause.*) She with yer when you was took, was she ?

CHARLIE (*his dream falling in splinters about him*) : We . . . we was walkin' down Oxford Street. You know 'ow it is there ? One minute you're t'gether arm in arm, an' the next one's ag'inst the wall and the other's in the gutter. That's where I was when I bumped bang into old Brown. 'E'd got another split[1] with 'im from another division. We all stepped off the pavement together like. It was a proper cop. I knew it was no good talkin' once 'e said I was wanted. Least said the better, till you're in front of the magistrate. I see Belle give a bit of a jump and go white, like as if she'd seen a ghost. An' I was afraid of tryin' t' give 'er the down[2] case she got mixed up in it as well. Then me an' the big feller catches a bus. I 'adn't 'ad 'er with me, I'd 've give 'im a fight for it. I made sure she'd make f'r 'ome. All the time I've been inside I've been countin' the hours till I see 'er. An' now she ain't 'ere. Any 'arm's come to 'er I'll . . . kill old Brown. You ain't been to the police ?

ANNIE : For nearly a week I done all I could t' keep it dark. An' I might've gorn on findin' excuses for 'er not bein' about if it 'adn't a been for 'er loud-mouthed, bloody fool of a father an' that dam' woman with the plant in 'er front winder as 'ad t' be watered every time I was comin' in or out.

CHARLIE : Gord's truth ! Ain't it fair ? An' me makin' up me mind t' go straight as a die in future because of 'er.

[1] Detective. [2] Warning.

ANNIE (*vehemently*) : Straight or crooked, I don't care a tupny dam' about *you*. It's 'er I think of —'er ! Who yer got round t' go with yer ag'inst any wish of mine.

CHARLIE : You said we . . .

ANNIE (*bending over him*) : An' for all we know she might be layin' dead at the bottom of the cut[1] this very minute over you. (*Seizing him by the shoulders and shaking him*) You thievin' swine yer, couldn't yer keep yer eyes orf a decent gel ? Couldn't yer . . .

CHARLIE (*seizing her wrists*) : Didn't I tell yer I . . .

ANNIE : Wasn't there ernough of Tessie Bernsteins an' Rose Martins t' suit the rotten likes of you ? 'Ow dare *you* lift yer eyes t' the likes of my gel !

[*Door L. opens quietly, and* BELLE *enters. She looks very smart in a tailor-made costume, close-fitting hat, worn at just the right angle, stockings and shoes of impeccable taste, and carries, under her arm, a short umbrella and a handbag.*

CHARLIE (*tearing himself from* ANNIE'S *grasp*) : You're gorn mad, ain't yer ? (*He stares at* BELLE.)

BELLE (*with a laugh*) : *You're* one of the fam'ly already, are yer ? (*Self-consciously*) Hallo . . .

ANNIE (*who has slewed round at the first sound of* BELLE'S *voice*) : You . . .

BELLE (*swinging her umbrella*) : S'pose so. (*Saunters to table : to* CHARLIE, *who is tucking his tie in*) You look as if you've 'ad a proper rough-'ouse.

ANNIE (*shouting*) : Where . . . where yer been ?

BELLE (*a little appealingly*) : Ain't you goin' t' give us a kiss, Mum ?

ANNIE : Kiss *you* ! You'll see what I'm goin' t' do with you, me lady, before you're much older.

[1] Canal.

(*Pointing*) Where'd yer git them clothes you're wearing? (CHARLIE *looks as if he'd like to know.*)

BELLE (*hiding her disappointment*) : That's a nice question to ask a lady, I must say.

ANNIE : Lady ! *You !*

BELLE (*starting*) : That's what I said. (*In even tones*) An' yer need not shout, because I ain't gorn deaf since yer see me last. (*A little whimsical*) Don't yer want t' kiss me?

ANNIE (*holding table for support, indignant*) : My Gord !

BELLE (*to* CHARLIE) : P'r'aps you do? (CHARLIE *looks away.*) I'd like someone to. (*Lays aside umbrella and bag on table.*)

ANNIE (*hoarsely*) : Where've yer been?

BELLE (*to* CHARLIE) : You're a nice sort t' take a gel out—leaving 'er in the lurch the way yer did.

CHARLIE (*resentful*) : Could I 'elp it? Any'ow, yer knew yer way 'ome.

BELLE (*coolly*) : Oh, don't think I minded much. (ANNIE *looks bewildered.*) After the first fright of seein' you go orf with . . . yer pal . . . (*He winces.*) . . . I wasn't long sizin' things up. Didn't 'ave sich a bad time after that. (*To* ANNIE) Well, Mum, are yer ready t' kiss an' be friends?

ANNIE : D'you know who yer talkin' to? I'm yer mother.

BELLE (*laughing*) : Yer not blamin' me, are yer? (*A warning note in her voice, her face set*) You'll git a fat lot out of me if yer talk to me like that.

ANNIE : Ain't . . . ain't you dam' well ashamed of yerself?

BELLE (*defiant*) : No. (ANNIE *starts.*) 'Ad I ought t' be? Oh, so that's it ! I was expected t' come

'ome full of tears, was I ? T' be full of the 'ard, 'ard world an' the biffs it's give me. I *am* sorry. If I'd 'ave known, I might've tried not t' disappoint yer. A couple of hours after Charlie (*laughing*) left me, I could've done it to the life. Only then it would've been wasted. I wouldn't even 'ave been asked where I'd been. See, nothink can 'appen to a gel who's away only a couple of hours, and in daylight. But after I'd been in a Lyons's an' 'ad a cup of tea I was all right.

ANNIE (*forcing herself to restraint*) : Can't yer realise what everybody's been sayin' ?

BELLE : About me ? My, I must 've been gettin' t' be quite a somebody ! I'd 've thought people would 've 'ad somethink better to do with their time.

ANNIE (*spitefully*) : What's it t' you that yer mother's been trapesin' the West End lookin' for yer after long mornin's at the wash-tub.

BELLE (*sympathetic*) : You 'ave ?

ANNIE : Course I 'ave. Two an' three times a week. What else d'yer think I'd do ?

BELLE : But I asked a gel t' post a postcard for me tellin' yer I was all right, and that I'd be down t' see yer as soon as I could.

ANNIE : What d'yer mean, as soon as yer could ? I've seen no postcard.

BELLE (*insistent*) : But *I* sent yer one more than a week ago. Really, I did ! (*Moves impulsively as though to embrace her mother.*) Oh, Mum . . .

ANNIE (*brushing her hands away*) : No, yer don't ! (BELLE *looks hurt.*) There's a bit more I want t' know before yer touch me.

BELLE (*with a sigh*) : But there wasn't nothink f'r you t' take on about !

ANNIE : Funny sort of mother I'd be if I 'adn't

been worried t' death, placed as I was. Well, I'm waitin' t' 'ear what yer meant be sayin' you'd be 'ome as soon as yer could? Could what? What kep' yer? Or who, if yer'd sooner I put it that way?

BELLE (*wincing*) : Oh, so that's what yer think?

ANNIE (*tempestuously*) : What the 'ell else am I t' think?

BELLE (*involuntarily*) : I met Ada Weston . . . (ANNIE *and* CHARLIE *start at the name*) . . . an' stayed with 'er a couple of days.

ANNIE (*bitterly*) : Mmm. . . . I thought as much. Another nice beauty! She got any more kids since she left the neighbourhood she don't know the father of?

BELLE (*resentfully*) : I didn't know she didn't know the father of the one she 'ad before she left 'ere. An' she's done a dam' sight better than she would've done if she'd stopped on round 'ere t' be spit upon be everybody.

ANNIE : Ugh, I don't wonder *you* think so.

BELLE : And 'er baby's a credit to 'er, for all it's only got a mother to look after it. That's more than can be said f'r arf the poor little devils yer see draggin' the gutter round 'ere.

ANNIE : Christ! I'm learnin' things! Credit to 'er! After yer left that drab what d'yer do?

BELLE (*doggedly*) : Lots.

ANNIE (*shouting*) : What d'yer do? D'yer want me t' clout yer?

BELLE (*defiantly*) : You do! You'll be sorry after.

[*Pause.*

ANNIE (*obviously thinking it expedient to go slow*) : Set down. (BELLE *smiles.*) An' tell us all that's 'appened to yer.

BELLE (*going to Windsor armchair and brushing cushion on seat of it with her gloves*) : That's more like it. (*Glances at* CHARLIE *with a smile, as she pulls off her hat, shakes out her hair, and settles herself in chair.*) Ain't you goin' t' set down, the pair of yer ?

ANNIE (*glaring at* CHARLIE) : 'E'd got a 'apporth of sense 'e'd 've made 'isself scarce long before this. What you've got t' say ain't got nothink t' do with 'im.

CHARLIE : It ain't, ain't it ? (*bringing chair to centre of table, facing audience*) We'll see all about that. (*Sits firmly, eyeing the others.*)

BELLE (*to* ANNIE, *who seems about to throw herself upon* CHARLIE) : Oh, give the poor boy a chance, Mum. (*Smiles at him*) 'E give me one, for all it was a-naccident.

ANNIE : Chance ?

BELLE (*rather roguish*) : Mm, mm. . . .

[ANNIE *sits L. of table, her lips compressed.*

CHARLIE (*tapping table with his index finger*) : What about that fur coat ?

BELLE (*pertly*) : That's what I mean. (ANNIE *shows impatience.*) It wasn't a bad un neether. (*A merry laugh.*) Only I must've looked a proper date wearin' it the 'ot day it was. (*Quizzing him*) What about it ?

CHARLIE (*irritated*) : That's what I said.

BELLE : Yer did give it to me, yer know.

CHARLIE : Only because I thought you was goin' with me.

BELLE : Well, I did, didn't I ?

CHARLIE : For reg'lar, I mean.

BELLE (*seriously*) : That depen's. You make me want to, I might.

ANNIE (*sharply*) : An' yer might not. What's this got t' do with what yer've been doin' ?

BELLE (*provokingly*) : I'm comin' to it.

ANNIE : Yer better tell me ; I'll 'ave it out of yer some way.

BELLE : Ain't you polite ? I've been workin', if you must know.

ANNIE (*drily*) : The next thing'll be Ada Weston recommended yer for a job.

BELLE : That's *just* what she did do.

ANNIE : Thought you said you only stopped with 'er a couple of days ?

BELLE : So I did.

ANNIE : Well, then where'd yer go ?

BELLE : Lived on me means, as they say in books.

CHARLIE : I like the way yer got of puttin' it.

ANNIE (*controlling herself with difficulty*) : Yer what ! Don't come none of them larks with me, me lady. This ain't no jokin' matter.

[BELLE *rummages in her bag.*

BELLE (*producing pasteboard*) : All right. (*Tosses it on table.*) There !

[ANNIE *snatches it up.*

CHARLIE : If you didn't mean goin' with me, what d'yer take the fur coat for ?

BELLE : A present, that's what.

ANNIE (*thrusting card from her, disgusted*) : A pawn-ticket.

BELLE (*grimacing at* CHARLIE) : For the fur coat.

CHARLIE (*sitting bolt upright*) : What ! (*Snatches up ticket.*)

ANNIE : For four-pun-ten. Do you mean t' tell me you was brazen ernough t' go in yerself an' pawn it ? I've never once been in one of them

places, never ; an' I only 'ope t' Gord I never do. I'd starve sooner than I . . .

BELLE (*with alacrity*) : I wouldn't, that's all.

CHARLIE (*dropping ticket on table*) : Yer must've thought a lot of me t' go an' do a thing like that.

BELLE (*spiritedly*) : A dam' sight more than you 'ave of me, judgin' be the way you've treated all I been tellin' yer.

ANNIE (*drumming on table*) : You won't ask me t' believe as four-pun-ten lasted yer up t' now ?

BELLE (*a trace of weariness in her tone*) : It might've done.

ANNIE (*rising, pointing at her*) : An' what about the clothes you're wearin' ? If I'm a judge, more than *that* went t' the cost of *them*. (*Unable to suppress a sneer*) I s'pose the money as went t' the payin' for them was come be honest ?

BELLE (*after hesitation*) : No. . . .

[CHARLIE *breathes hard.*

ANNIE : Ah . . .

BELLE (*defiantly*) : But it will be !

ANNIE (*terribly taken aback*) : D'yer mean they *ain't* paid for ?

BELLE : Pleasin' some people takes some doin'.

ANNIE : I've lived to 'ear a daughter of mine tell me to me face she's wearin' clothes what ain't been paid for !

BELLE : Well, 'arf the people yer meet are doin' the same !

ANNIE : What a dam' lie ! *I* never owed f'r nothink in me life. What I couldn't afford t' pay for on the nail[1] I done without ; an' you know it.

BELLE (*heatedly*) : Are you 'arf the people yer meet ? An' what's doin' without done f'r you ?

[1] At once.

ANNIE (*pointing to door L.*) : You just go upstairs an' take them things 'orf ! (*Slight pause.*) Where's them yer went away in ?

BELLE (*firmly*) : If *you* think I've come 'ere t' stop, you've got it all wrong.

ANNIE (*alarmed*) : Oh, an' where d'yer think yer place is, if it ain't in yer own 'ome ?

BELLE (*rising and taking up her hat*) : You better git the idea in yer 'ead that this ain't me 'ome no more.

[*Puts hat on before overmantel.*

ANNIE (*with a gasp*) : D'yer . . . d'yer know what you're sayin' ?

BELLE (*turning towards her*) : That's just what bein' away from 'ome's done f'r me : it's learnt me that I've got a *say*, an' somethink of 'ow t' say it.

ANNIE (*freeing her elbows of her rolled-up sleeves*) : You're quite sure that's all it 'as done for yer ? (*Pointing*) Now, listen t' me, *you* . . .

BELLE (*blenching*) : If . . . if you're goin' t' be-'ave silly, now . . .

ANNIE : I've been that long ernough where you've been concerned, yer saucy . . .

BELLE (*taking up umbrella and bag*) : That's right ! (*Picks up pawn-ticket.*)

ANNIE : Another word, an' yer'll feel the weight of me 'and.

BELLE (*after bestowing a glance at* ANNIE ; *to* CHARLIE) : You can 'ave that if yer want it. (*Proffers ticket.*)

CHARLIE (*repudiating it*) : What the 'ell's the good of that t' me ?

BELLE (*slipping it into her bag*) : Oh, well, p'r'aps you're right. (*After a moment's cogitation, quietly*) If you like t' come a bit of the way with me yer

might 'ear somethink as'll straighten yer ideas out about things.

CHARLIE (*smiling in spite of himself*) : I ain't done with you yut, so yer needn't think it.

BELLE : That's as well t' know. (*Places umbrella under her arm and turns towards her mother, who bars her way to door L.*)

ANNIE (*emphatically*) : You don't go out of this 'ouse till I've 'eard all there is to know about yer carryin's on. And, if yer go then . . . yer go f'r good. (*Voices heard off L., followed by a door-slam.*) 'Ere's yer father !

[BELLE *tosses her head.* BILL *enters L., followed by* SAM : *the former is just a little drunk.*

BILL (*taking in the scene*) : So it's right. (*To* BELLE) You are 'ere !

BELLE : It's all right. You ain't seein' things. 'Allo, Uncle Sam !

SAM (*cheerfully*) : What yer, Belle ! (*Starts on seeing* CHARLIE, *and moves towards him.*)

BILL (*pointing at* CHARLIE) : An' what's that tea-leaf doin' 'ere ?

CHARLIE (*glaring at him*) : You wasn't Belle's father I'd show yer.

SAM (*to* CHARLIE) : 'Ave a good time in stir,[1] did yer ?

CHARLIE : Better than you'll 'ave in orspital, if you ain't careful.

SAM (*facetiously*) : Aw, be amicable !

BILL (*to* ANNIE, *pointing at* BELLE) : She don't stop 'ere !

BELLE (*scornfully*) : I know I don't.

ANNIE (*vociferous*) : She *do* stop 'ere ! (*Pointing at* CHARLIE) D'yer want t' drive 'er into the power of that feller an' 'e's like ?

[1] Prison.

BELLE (*stridently, flashing glances at them all in turn*) : Don't upset yer lovely selves ! Belle's bein' drove into nothink be nobody. She can take care of 'erself better than any of yer give 'er credit for. If Charlie 'ere can keep 'isself straight an' git a job somewhere, I'll alwers be glad t' see 'im. But even 'e ain't got t' run away with the idea I'm goin' to 'itch meself up to a feller before I can see me way clear to 'avin' a better time than most of the married womin round 'ere 'as. (CHARLIE *is embarrassed.*) If ever 'e do come t' want t' marry me—an' that won't be for years yut—'e's got t' show 'e's good ernough.

[SAM *whistles, and grins at* CHARLIE, *who shows resentment.*

CHARLIE : That's awright, Belle. (*She smiles at him.*)

SAM (*to* CHARLIE) : On probation !

ANNIE (*wetting her lips with her tongue*) : Talk's cheap, me lady.

BILL : Want t' marry *you* ! Who the 'ell's goin' t' do that ? After the game you've been on.

BELLE (*a suggestion of tears in her angry voice*) : I've done nothink I'm ashamed of ; that's more than some of *you* can say !

ANNIE (*ominous steadiness of tone*) : Yer might be able t' come it over some people, but yer don't git over yer mother that way.

BELLE (*tearful and angry*) : Who wants t' come it over *you* ? Ever since yer set eyes on me you've done nothink but pick me t' pieces.

ANNIE (*snapping*) : What d'yer want with comin' 'ome at all for if you're so eager t' go away ag'in ?

BELLE (*wildly*) : You've been told all you're goin' t' be. You can dam' well think what yer like, f'r my part. I'm goin' . . .

ANNIE : You ain't.

BELLE : What d'yer want me t' stop for if yer think I'm sich a bad lot ?

BILL : She ain't been tryin' t' make out she ain't a bad lot.

ANNIE : She's 'ardly said a word yut of what she's been doin', except that she met that Ada Weston.

BILL (*simultaneous with a quiet whistle from* SAM) : Ahhh ! . . .

ANNIE (*with a bitter laugh*) : An' afterwards lived on 'er means for a time.

BILL : On 'er . . . An' you believe 'er ?

ANNIE : I know where she got the mony t' tidy 'er over f'r a bit : she pawned the fur coat.

SAM (*guffawing*) : One to 'er !

BELLE (*passionately*) : I'd 've told yer all there was t' tell if you 'adn't as good as called me a loose Lizzie straight away.

BILL (*gesticulating*) : What else are yer ? What d'yer think you are ? A blessin' in disguise, or what ?

SAM : Give the kid a chance !

BILL (*to* SAM) : Who's brat is she ?

CHARLIE (*supporting* BELLE) : You wasn't 'er father, I'd push yer face back !

BILL : She don't stop here, not if I know it !

BELLE : Don't worry yerself ; we're both of the same opinion about that.

ANNIE (*adamant*) : She don't go out of 'ere. Not without a dam' good reason, an' unless I know where she's goin'.

BELLE (*vehemently*) : I've told yer ? I'm goin' 'ome.

ANNIE : An' I've told you yer 'ome's 'ere.

BELLE (*a little hysterical*) : You wouldn't think so ! You've made a big mistake if yer think I'd stay where I ain't trusted.

ANNIE (*hardly controlling herself*) : Trusted ! You ! What's that got to do with it ? I'm yer mother . . . worse blasted luck.

BELLE (*brokenly*) : It ain't a mother's place, I s'pose, t' believe in 'er daughter. Only for a daughter t' trust 'er mother. (*Laughs hysterically.*)

CHARLIE (*persuasively*) : Tell 'em what they want t' know, Belle. (*She dabs at her eyes with her handkerchief.*) Give 'em yer address. I'll see they don't worry yer. Why don't yer ? (*She shakes her head.*)

ANNIE (*ironically*) : Because it would give the whole show away, that's why.

BELLE (*tearing her handkerchief from her face, spasmodically*) : You know all about it. . . . (*Her head drops as a fit of passionate weeping overcomes her.*)

ANNIE (*triumphantly*) : I knew it ! I knew it !

BELLE : You . . . don't . . . know . . .

ANNIE : Yer might well cry, yer dirty little . . .

[BELLE, *her head bent, and weeping, winces as if every word of* ANNIE'S *is a whip eating into her flesh.*

BILL (*generally, gesticulating*) : What've I said ? What've I said all along ?

SAM (*to* BILL) : Forget it.

ANNIE (*seizing* BELLE'S *arm and hurling the words at her*) : If yer'd come 'ome with shame in yer 'eart f'r the rotten thing you've done, that 'ud've been bad ernough, but I'd 've tried me 'ardest to do me best by yer. To try an' brazen it out before everyone ! Givin' yerself airs, as though what yer've done was somethink t' be proud of, an' tryin' t' make out it was me

what's in the wrong, that's what I can't forgive. (*Shakes her.*)

BELLE (*pulling free*) : Wait'll I've done somethink t' be forgive for ! Wait'll I ask yer to forgive me !

ANNIE (*fast losing control*) : 'Ow I've kep' meself from tearin' yer t' bits, I dunno. Yer dam' little rotter, you . . . (*Makes a clawing grab at* BELLE, *who draws back horrified.* CHARLIE *seizes* ANNIE'S *wrists.*) I'll be the death of yer . . . I'll . . . (*Beside herself, struggling*) You lemme go !

BILL (*shouting at* CHARLIE) : Let 'er alone ! She's a right t' chastise the dirty little swine. You let 'er alone !

ANNIE (*struggling wildly*) : Let me git at 'er ! Only let me git me 'ands on 'er. I'll murder 'er !

SAM (*coming to* CHARLIE'S *assistance*) : Easy on, Annie gel ! (*To* BILL) Ain't you got sense ernough t' see she'll do the kid a-ninjury ? (*Brutally, to* ANNIE) 'Old it up, d'yer 'ear !

ANNIE : Lemme go ! Lemme go, I say ! I'll flay the little bitch alive ! I'll . . .

SAM (*struggling with* ANNIE) : Git the kid away !

BILL (*to* BELLE) : You git out of this ! D'yer 'ear ? Git out !

SAM (*to* CHARLIE) : I c'n 'old 'er for a bit. (*To* BELLE) You better 'op it, Belle. You want a-nand you c'n alwers find me at " The Feathers." (*To* ANNIE) 'Ere, 'old it up, Annie gel. D'yer 'ear ?

BILL (*to* BELLE) : Ain't I told yer t' git out ?

CHARLIE (*to* BELLE) : Come on, Belle !

[*Helps her to reclaim her umbrella and handbag, and leads her out L. She is crying quietly, and seems hardly cognisant of what is happening.*

Exit CHARLIE *and* BELLE *L.*

BILL (*shouting after them*) : Don't come showin' yer face 'ere ag'in ! (*Slams door L. to.*)

ANNIE (*shouting*) : Come back ! Come back ! (*To* SAM) Let-me-go ! (SAM *releases her and steps back, barring the way to door.*) Where . . . (*Looks round wildly.*) Where've they gorn ? (BILL *goes upstage of table.*)

SAM (*soothingly*) : Careful, old gel. Yer won't do yerself no good be gittin' into a state.

ANNIE (*making as if to rush him*) : Come away from that door !

SAM : It's no good, Annie ; they've gorn.

ANNIE : I'll 'ave 'er ! I'll 'ave 'er ! (SAM *shakes his head and smiles sympathetically.*) Come away. . . . (*A sudden change takes place in her. She passes a hand over her face, sways on her feet, so that* SAM *hastens towards her in case she should fall, then staggers back till she is brought up short by contact with table, on which she leans heavily. A terrible sob shakes her.*) Thank . . . thank Gord, she 'as gorn. (*Dazedly*) It . . . it come over me like a wave. (*Frenziedly, to* SAM) What d'yer want to 'old me for ? (*Drops on chair L. of table, her head low on her breast, and cries.*)

SAM (*standing by her, to* BILL) : Git 'er a drink !

(BILL *hurries into scullery with glass taken from dresser.*)

ANNIE : I . . . I wouldn't care if I 'adn't alwers done me best be 'er.

SAM (*patting her shoulder*) : Bear up, old gel.

ANNIE : She 'adn't 've got slack in 'er work this might never 've 'appened. What've *I* done t' deserve it ? What've I done ? I've alwers worked 'ard ; all me life I've alwers worked 'ard. F'r what ? I didn't want 'er t' go. I didn't.

BILL (*coming from scullery with glass of water*) :

She's gorn. (*Handing glass to* SAM) An' dam' good riddance to 'er !

SAM (*as* ANNIE *takes glass from him and drinks*) : 'Ave some eighteen pence,[1] will yer ?

ANNIE (*allowing* SAM *to take glass from her*) : Watchin' 'er I 'ad me own life over ag'in, extry like. Now what've I got left ? She don't want me. I ain't necessary to 'er no more. I was t' go after 'er an' fetch 'er back 'ere what odds would it make ? She'd be orf ag'in no sooner I turned me back.

BILL : Didn't I alwers say yer let 'er 'ave too much of 'er own way ? Ain't I alwers told . . .

ANNIE (*flashing an angry glance at him*) : 'Old yer bloody row, you !

SAM (*threatening* BILL) : Sometimes you make me wonder what the bloke dishin' out the brains was doin' when you was born. (*To* ANNIE) P'r'aps things'll turn out f'r the best. Yer never know.

[*The rat-tat of a postman's knock heard off L. They all start.*

BILL : Post ! (*Without moving*) Post !

SAM (*fiercely*) : Well, answer the door ! (BILL *hurries off L.*)

ANNIE : It's 'ard, dam' 'ard, when it's yer only one an' all.

SAM : Don't I know ! Still, you 'ave got the consolation of knowin' it's through no fault of yourn.

[BILL *returns L. with a letter.*

BILL (*reading address*) : *Missus* W. Collins ! It's f'r you. (*Hands it to her reluctantly.*)

ANNIE (*after wiping her eyes strenuously on corner of her apron*) : Looks like 'er writin'.

SAM (*giving a whistle of amazement*) : Belle !

[1] Sense.

ANNIE (*turning letter over and over in her hand*) : She *did* say summink about a postcard. But she never mentioned she'd writ me a letter.

BILL (*impatiently*) : Ain't yer goin' t' open it?

[*She slowly tears envelope open, taking a folded sheet of notepaper from it. As she unfolds this, another folded paper drops to the floor.* SAM *hurriedly picks this from floor before* BILL *has a chance to do so, opens it out, and hands it to Annie : it is a ten shilling Treasury note. A pause, during which they exchange looks all round.*

SAM : She can't be so dam' bad t' send yer ten ogg.[1]

BILL (*sneering*) : 'Ow was it got? That's the thing. (*Quails before the threatening look* SAM *gives him.*) Any'ow, it'll pay f'r yer boots.

ANNIE (*to* SAM, *proffering letter*) : You read it, Sam. I . . . I can't make it out prop'ly. . . .

SAM (*making an effort of it, squaring his shoulders, etc.*) : Hempire 'Otel, Palm Street, W.C. (*Raises his eyebrows.*) Dear Mum,—No doubt yer got my card from Ada Weston's place. I would 'ave come 'ome sooner if I 'ad not been lucky ernough to git a job 'ere. It was all through Ada I got same. She 'as been workin' 'ere nearly a year now. She sleeps out, but I 'ave to sleep in. It ain't much, but it is a start. And I pick up a few shillings one way an' another. If I can manage it I will be down to see you soon, but I can't say for sure when exactly. I am sendin' you a little somethink t' treat yourself with. Don't let Dad see it. (BILL *looks malignant.*) It is for you. Your lovin' daughter, Belle.

(ANNIE *looks terribly sick as* SAM *drops letter in her lap.*)

ANNIE (*her breast heaving*) : What've I done? My Gord, she'll never forgive me. . . . (*Great sobs shake her as* CURTAIN *closes.*)

[1] Ten shillings.

SOCRATES

SOCRATES

A PLAY IN SIX SCENES

CLIFFORD BAX

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To A. D. Peters

PERSONS IN THE PLAY

SOCRATES	
CRITO	An old disciple of Socrates
PHÆDO	A young disciple
SIMMIAS	Another
CEBES	Another
ARISTOPHANES	The playwright
ERYXIMACHUS	A doctor
AGATHON	A young playwright
ARCHILOCHUS	His father
ALCIBIADES	The Athenian general
MELETUS	A poet
LYCON	An orator
ANYTUS	A tanner
A FAUN	
A DRYAD	
AN OFFICER OF THE LAW COURT	
XANTIPPE	Wife of Socrates
EUTHENOE	A flute-girl

Slaves, Soldiers, and Law Officers

SCENE I

PERSONS IN SCENE I

ARCHILOCHUS	(70)	
MELETUS	(35)	
AGATHON	(24)	Son of Archilochus
ALCIBIADES	(45)	
SOCRATES	(69)	

SCENE I

A corner of the Lyceum—" a gymnasium and garden with covered walks," near a temple of Apollo.

Entrance back centre ; another right.

Back, a long seat of stone. On this ARCHILOCHUS *is sitting. He is an old man ; he uses a stick ; he shows that he is in a bad temper.*

Enter MELETUS—*about thirty-five—a clever man and one who knows it.*

MELETUS (*seeing* ARCHILOCHUS) : Ah ! . . . Good afternoon, sir. I expected to find your son. May I talk with his father instead ?

[ARCHILOCHUS *glowers, and brusquely motions* MELETUS *to the seat.*

Agathon is probably detained at the theatre ? . . . I understand that he had to attend the last rehearsal of his tragedy ? . . . You must be proud of him. Everybody assures me that he is more than likely to win the prize.

[ARCHILOCHUS *grunts.* MELETUS *begins to feel uncomfortable.*

I hope you are well, sir ?

ARCHILOCHUS : Thanks.

MELETUS (*making conversation*) : What a reception Alcibiades had ! But weren't you rather surprised when the Government recalled him from exile ? Suppose he *does* conquer Sicily, what will he do next ? That's the danger !

ARCHILOCHUS : Hm.

MELETUS : Even a tyranny relies in the end upon popular support. You can take it from me, the Government only recalled Alcibiades because they wanted to curry favour with the crowd. . . . You really are well, sir ?

ARCHILOCHUS : Thanks.

MELETUS : This new decree shows clearly how weak they are.

ARCHILOCHUS : Decree ?

MELETUS : Yes. You remember how the Government sent various revolutionary fellows into exile at Salamis ?

ARCHILOCHUS : Hm.

MELETUS : Well, sir—they're to be brought back.

ARCHILOCHUS : What !

MELETUS : It's all right. When they arrive here, they'll be put to death.

ARCHILOCHUS : There's a man in Athens who is much more dangerous than any of those rascals. And *he* goes about scot-free.

MELETUS : You are speaking of . . . ?

ARCHILOCHUS : Socrates.

MELETUS : *There* I'm inclined to agree with you.

ARCHILOCHUS : A poisonous fellow. I tell you, he's been the ruin of the younger generation—the ruin. And I'm not the only man who thinks so.

MELETUS : You're not. (*Seeing* AGATHON *approach*) But here is your son. I'll be off.

ARCHILOCHUS : Stay where you are.

[*Enter* AGATHON.

AGATHON : Father, I'm sorry to be so late. The rehearsal took longer than we expected. . . . Good afternoon, Meletus.

MELETUS : How is it going ?

AGATHON : Magnificently. The chorus couldn't be better. And won't it be marvellous to know that the great Alcibiades is in the audience ! It's an ordeal to have a play done before a man like that.

ARCHILOCHUS : There's nobody else, I suppose, whom you particularly want to please ?

AGATHON : Well—*you*, father.

ARCHILOCHUS : Me ! I was thinking of somebody whose father was a stonemason and his mother a midwife.

AGATHON (*stung*) : Socrates . . .

MELETUS : Perhaps you've seen through him at last ?

ARCHILOCHUS : Have you ? You're willing to give him up ?

AGATHON : No, father. . . . Of course not !

ARCHILOCHUS : You'd better !

AGATHON : Give him up ? Why ?

ARCHILOCHUS : Ah, that's just it ! Socrates encourages you boys to question everything. He shatters all the beliefs in which you were brought up, and in their place he gives you nothing—nothing.

MELETUS : I'm afraid your father is right.

AGATHON : I've learned more from Socrates than from everyone else put together.

ARCHILOCHUS : Learned ? What have you learned ? To doubt whether your elders are wise.

MELETUS : And whether our national religion is true. I have reason to think that the man's an atheist.

ARCHILOCHUS : Understand, Agathon. I have brought you up as a gentleman. I intend you to live as one. And I won't have you consorting with a beggarly windbag who ought to know better, at his age, than to fuddle the wits of a lot of greenhorns.

AGATHON : Most of his friends are much older than I. Crito must be seventy.

ARCHILOCHUS : Crito's a fool. And may I ask you, young man, how your precious idol contrives to live ?

AGATHON : Not on his friends, if that's what you mean. He never takes a penny for what he teaches.

MELETUS : So he knows what his teaching is worth ?

ARCHILOCHUS : Answer me plainly. Do you intend to renounce him or not ? . . . Well ?

AGATHON : I can't.

ARCHILOCHUS (*rising*) : Can't ? Can't ? And what if I say you must ?

AGATHON : Really, you don't understand him, either of you.

ARCHILOCHUS : Understand him ! He ought to be locked up. He is trying to break down all order, all morality, all religion. And I'll never believe that he consorts with rich young fools for nothing—not he !

AGATHON : You've no right to say that he sponges on anybody. He doesn't.

ARCHILOCHUS : Very well ! . . . I hope I shall live long enough to hear you say, " Father, I was wrong about that man." Otherwise, not a penny will you get from me !

[*Exit.*

MELETUS : There's a great deal of truth in what your father says.

AGATHON : Nonsense !

MELETUS : I can't understand what all you young fellows find in Socrates. Anybody can ask a string of questions. And what has he made of his life ? My dear boy, there are dozens of men in Athens who are cleverer than he is.

AGATHON : I should like to know them.

MELETUS : Perhaps you still think it is clever to be offensive. . . .

[*A noise of cheering. It approaches rapidly.*

AGATHON : Whatever is that ?

[*They rise, and look out, back.*

MELETUS : It must be . . . yes . . . it's Alcibiades.

AGATHON : Really ?

MELETUS : He's coming here.

AGATHON : How splendid !

MELETUS : I'll introduce you.

AGATHON : No, no—don't.

[*Enter* ALCIBIADES. *He speaks off.*

ALCIBIADES : Wait there. (*Striding forward*) Where is he, the old scoundrel ?

MELETUS : Who ?

ALCIBIADES : Eh ? Socrates.

MELETUS : He hasn't been here.

ALCIBIADES (*with good humour*) : Who else would have the effrontery to keep me waiting ? I've a very good mind to tweak his little snub nose. . . . Look here, I don't know who you are——

MELETUS : Meletus—the poet.

ALCIBIADES : When he *does* come, say I'm in the gymnasium. I think I'll have a wrestling-bout with the instructor.

MELETUS (*indicating* AGATHON) : May I introduce——

ALCIBIADES (*ignoring him*) : I know what it is. He has fallen into one of his reveries. Tell him that I can't allow *that* when he has an appointment with *me*.

[*Exit, right.*

AGATHON : I did feel a fool, Meletus.

MELETUS : An extraordinary man ! I wouldn't allow anybody else to treat me as if I were a servant.

[*Enter, back,* SOCRATES. *He stops, in a brown study.*

MELETUS : And now I shall have to wait here—to give that message.

AGATHON : Then even you succumb to the great man ?

MELETUS : Take my tip, Agathon. Make Alcibiades your model.

SOCRATES (*to himself*) : No !

MELETUS : Why——

AGATHON : There you are ! D'you know who has just been here ? Alcibiades ! He is in the gymnasium. He wants to see you.

SOCRATES (*advancing*) : He will find me here—that is, if you permit me to join you ?

AGATHON (*smiling*) : Permit !

SOCRATES (*taking a place between them on the seat*) : I imagine, as both of you are poets, that you were discussing the fine points of your art ?

AGATHON : We were discussing——

MELETUS : Whether the Government has done well to recall the exiles from Salamis.

SOCRATES : Strange ! I, too, have been thinking about that. Perhaps you will be able to make up my mind for me. What did you decide ?

MELETUS : I think they have acted wisely.

SOCRATES : And you, Agathon ?

AGATHON : I don't much like it.

SOCRATES : These men were sent into exile by the present Government. Is it not so ?

MELETUS : Of course.

SOCRATES : So that they might not do any damage to the State ?

MELETUS : Certainly.

SOCRATES : Have they done any damage ?

MELETUS : They couldn't.

SOCRATES : The sentence, therefore, achieved its purpose ?

MELETUS : Yes.

SOCRATES : Then it was a wise sentence ?

MELETUS : I think so.

SOCRATES : Would you agree that it would not have been wise unless it had been sufficient ?

MELETUS : I should.

SOCRATES : Do bear with my stupidity, Meletus. There is still one point that perplexes me.

MELETUS : What is it ?

SOCRATES : You say that the earlier sentence—of exile—was wise because it was sufficient : but you now say that the Government does wisely to put these men to death. If they are wise now, I do not see how they can have been wise before.

AGATHON : Caught, Meletus !

SOCRATES : To me it appears that they are punishing these men twice over for the same offence.

AGATHON : And to me.

SOCRATES : Is it possible that you are confusing wisdom with expedience ?

MELETUS : I think I understand my own language !

SOCRATES : Really ? I have never been able to define the most ordinary words. Wisdom, for example. Could you help me ?

MELETUS : An act is wise when it benefits the doer.

SOCRATES : Yes . . . that is quite clear. But is it easy to say what benefits the doer ?

MELETUS : Surely !

SOCRATES : Let me give you an example of my difficulty. During the last few days a number of people have told me the same story. It seems that a well-known Athenian, wishing to be thought a charitable man, gave a silver coin to a blind beggar. The coin was a bad one.

MELETUS (*disconcerted*) : What do you mean——

SOCRATES : I thought you would be able to tell me whether he benefited himself, and was therefore a wise man, or not ?

MELETUS : I'll not stay here to be insulted.

AGATHON : Oh !

SOCRATES : Am I right in thinking that he might have benefited his reputation but not his character ?

MELETUS : You are simply insufferable. . . .

SOCRATES (*affecting astonishment*) : What have I done ?

MELETUS : And I am not the only man in Athens who would be glad to see your mouth stopped—for good.

[*Exit.*

AGATHON : He really did *that* ?

SOCRATES : Evidently. . . . I was not quite sure until I had told the story.

AGATHON : You've made him furious. He'll stop at nothing to get even with you now.

SOCRATES : That can't be helped. . . . Tell me about your tragedy. Your father must be delighted ?

AGATHON : After the performance I have to attend a drinking-party at the house of my backer. But the next day I'm going to give a small party of my own. Aristophanes has promised to come. Will *you* ?

[*A brief pause.*

SOCRATES : If I am free, I will.

AGATHON : Free ?

SOCRATES : I may be in prison.

AGATHON : You ?

SOCRATES : Don't let us trouble ourselves about that. It may not happen.

AGATHON : How can I help troubling. . . .

SOCRATES : You'll get nothing out of me, so you'd better drop the subject.

[*They hear* ALCIBIADES *calling*, " Socrates ! "

AGATHON : Does *he* know about what may happen ?

SOCRATES : He may have heard something.

AGATHON : It's just one of your jokes ? It *must* be !

SOCRATES : You will soon know.

[*Enter, right,* ALCIBIADES.

ALCIBIADES : So even now you prefer the young to the famous ! However, you've got to spare a minute for me, do you hear ?

SOCRATES : Sit down with us.

ALCIBIADES : I wanted to see you about this new decree by the Government. . . .

SOCRATES : But, first of all, here is a young man with whom you must become acquainted. We shall all be seeing his play to-morrow.

AGATHON (*contemptuously*) : My play !

ALCIBIADES (*to* AGATHON) : What are you doing out here, eh ? . . . The same old story, just as it was when I was a lad. Nobody can ever get away from Socrates.

AGATHON : *I* can't.

ALBICIADES : He's a public peril. (*Indicating the gymnasium*) At your age you ought to be in there —wrestling and jumping.

AGATHON : I'm not due for another five minutes.

ALCIBIADES : Well, boy—take my advice, and don't try a fall in argument with this old fellow. He looks very simple, I know, but he always wins.

AGATHON : Even you found that ?

ALCIBIADES : If anyone else were so blunt about my misdemeanours, I'd see that he paid for it ! But I can't be angry with Socrates. . . . What indignities you have made me submit to !

SOCRATES : You are not still brooding over your visit to Hipponicus ? That was twenty-five years ago.

ALCIBIADES : I'd never have gone if you hadn't commanded me.

AGATHON : Do tell me the story.

SOCRATES : Well ?

ALCIBIADES (*smiling*) : You always love to abase me.

SOCRATES : When Alcibiades was about sixteen, he was the most beautiful youth in Athens. . . .

ALCIBIADES : Undoubtedly.

SOCRATES : Everybody adored him, including myself. . . .

ALCIBIADES : Did you !

SOCRATES : Well, one day he was walking along the street with some other boys when they saw a stately old gentleman coming from the opposite direction. . . .

ALCIBIADES : I said to the others : " And who is that old peacock ? " One of them answered : " That is Hipponicus, the richest man in the city." So I went up to him and slapped his face.

AGATHON : Slapped——? Why ?

ALCIBIADES : To see what would happen.

AGATHON : What did happen ?

ALCIBIADES : I married his daughter.

AGATHON : Oh, yes !

ALCIBIADES : And when Socrates heard what I had done, he ordered me to visit Hipponicus and offer to take a thrashing. That wasn't the last time that my well-known charm preserved me. . . . All the same, Agathon, I shouldn't advise you to slap *my* face.

SOCRATES : Did you want to see me about anything particular ?

ALCIBIADES : No. But I'm pretty busy with my military preparations, and I thought I would just say good-bye before you go.

AGATHON : Where is he going ?

ALCIBIADES : Surely the Government have notified you of their decision ?

SOCRATES : They have.

ALCIBIADES : Then you will have to set out for Salamis in two or three days ?

AGATHON : Salamis ?

ALCIBIADES : My dear boy, the Government is recalling certain exiles from Salamis, and three citizens have been appointed to fetch them. One of the three is Socrates.

for a few weeks, eh ?

AGATHON (*to* SOCRATES) : What did you mean about going to prison ?

SOCRATES : That I have no intention whatever of going to Salamis.

ALCIBIADES : What ? You'll dare disobey them ?

SOCRATES : Do you think that I would bring back those wretched men in order that a terrified Government may butcher them ?

ALCIBIADES : I say ! That's going to be serious.

AGATHON : We can't spare him. Alcibiades !

ALCIBIADES : What can *I* do ? Nobody's ever persuaded Socrates to act against his convictions. We must hope that the Government will fall. There's a chance of it.

SOCRATES : Cheer up, Agathon ! Free or a prisoner, I shall not leave Athens. And, with any luck, I shall be at your drinking-party. Come, now—it's time you were in the gymnasium. Alcibiades, let us see if the young men of to-day are as eager as they were in your time to keep the body supple and beautiful.

ALCIBIADES (*not recovered from his astonishment*) : What a man I should be—if I had *your* force of character !

[*They go toward the exit, right.*

SCENE II

PERSONS IN SCENE II

AGATHON		
ARISTOPHANES	(40)	The playwright
CEBES	(28)	
SIMMIAS	(28)	
ERYXIMACHUS	(30)	A doctor
EUTHENOE		A flute-girl
SOCRATES		
ALCIBIADES		
TWO SLAVES		

SCENE II

A room in the house of AGATHON.

Summer night. Small windows, back, overlooking the courtyard. There is a door, back right, and another, left. On the back wall, centre, a tempera-painting of Aphrodite.

At this period the Athenians at a drinking-party, like that which is here in progress, reclined on long couches. Two persons used each couch, the one being lower down on the couch than the other. They rested on the left arm ; but it was considered tedious not to change position frequently.

Three of these couches have been set out. They should be arranged as the producer thinks best. Beside each person is a small table with fruit, etc.

SIMMIAS *and* CEBES *share one of the couches ;* ARISTOPHANES *and* ERYXIMACHUS *another.* AGATHON *is at present by himself on the third.*

In the foreground, seated on a stool, EUTHENOE, *a flute-girl.*

TWO SLAVES *attend, going in and out by the door, left.*

When the CURTAIN *rises, a murmur of general conversation.*

AGATHON : All the same, Aristophanes, I envy your comic genius.

ARISTOPHANES : You have taken the prize for tragedy. Isn't that enough for you ? And comedy is much too easy : you have only to make people recognise how ridiculous other people are.

CEBES : Agathon, if I am really to act as master of ceremonies, I would suggest that we can't do very much longer without the wine.

AGATHON : I'm so sorry. I was waiting for Socrates.

SIMMIAS : I think we are all a bit sleepy. It has been such a burning day.

AGATHON : Of course we will have the wine now, if you command it.

CEBES : Let's give him another five minutes. In the meanwhile, send one of your slaves to see if he is anywhere in the neighbourhood.

AGATHON : Right. (*To one of the* SLAVES) Run and look for Socrates.

[*The* SLAVE *goes out, back.*

SIMMIAS : More music ! Will you allow that, Cebes ?

ERYXIMACHUS : Must we ? Music invariably makes me miserable. I always begin to think about my wasted youth, and how soon all my friends will be dead.

ARISTOPHANES : That's just how I feel, doctor, when I swallow your medicines.

ERYXIMACHUS : Is it ! I can only say that I should like your comedies much better if they contained less music and more back-chat.

ARISTOPHANES : You want to cut off the limbs of a play and leave only the torso.

ERYXIMACHUS : Most plays are too long. Even yours.

ARISTOPHANES : And so are your bills. Abbreviation should begin at home.

CEBES : Well, I'm in favour of music. We must keep awake somehow till Socrates comes.

ARISTOPHANES : Eryximachus, when you can't bear it any longer, you have permission to weep softly upon my shoulder.

AGATHON : Euthenoe !

[EUTHENOE *rises, and plays a flute solo. She then returns to her stool.*

ERYXIMACHUS (*shaking his head dolefully*) : My poor Aristophanes ! A few years, and you will be nothing but bones and ashes. . . .

ARISTOPHANES : A few minutes, and *you* will be nothing but groans and gashes !

[*Enter, back, the* SLAVE.

AGATHON : Well ?

SLAVE : He is coming—now.

AGATHON : Splendid ! Bring us the wine. . . .

[*The* SLAVES *go out, left.*

CEBES : We had better say nothing about the danger in which Socrates now stands. . . .

SIMMIAS : Of course not.

ERYXIMACHUS : If *I* were in *his* position, I should get blind drunk.

CEBES : I daresay I should, too ; but, anyway, he has not been apprehended—yet.

[*The* SLAVES *return with jars of wine and of water.*

(*The Greeks very rarely drank their wine neat.*)

SIMMIAS : My word—what jars ! Cebes, are we to drink heavily or not ?

CEBES : What does the company say ?

AGATHON : I, at least, am for moderation. I drank far too much last night.

ARISTOPHANES : And so did I.

ERYXIMACHUS : Don't overdo it—that's my advice.

SIMMIAS : Excellent ! As for Socrates, it makes no difference to him whether you command him to drink copiously or not at all.

CEBES : Moderation, then.

ARISTOPHANES : Eryximachus.

ERYXIMACHUS (*defensively*) : What now ?

ARISTOPHANES : I know why you want us to keep sober. Because you hate people to pronounce your name Ery-mixes-us.

ERYXIMACHUS : If only I could find a cure for buffoonery !

AGATHON : Well, but where *is* he ? Socrates !

[*Enter* SOCRATES, *back.*

SOCRATES : Here !

[*Cries of welcome.*

SOCRATES : I was afraid that you would all have gone home to bed by this time. It's only an hour to dawn.

AGATHON : I confess that we had got to the drowsy stage ; but I daresay you'll wake us up. Here is your place—by me.

[SOCRATES *takes his place on* AGATHON'S *couch.*

SOCRATES : Congratulations upon the triumph of your tragedy.

AGATHON : Thank you. . . . I don't know what we are to do by way of entertainment. Eryximachus couldn't survive another note of music.

SOCRATES : Not even Euthenoe's ?

ERYXIMACHUS : The master of ceremonies must invent some other diversion.

CEBES : Must I ? Very well, then.

ERYXIMACHUS : Anything but music !

CEBES : Let us praise love. Everyone in turn is to make a speech about love.

AGATHON : Good !

SIMMIAS : In what order ?

ARISTOPHANES : It's not fair ! You can see in his eye that he has already composed his own speech—probably this afternoon.

CEBES : Nonsense ! The notion has only just occurred to me.

SIMMIAS : As you have invented the game, you ought to begin it : and then we'll go round from right to left.

AGATHON : Agreed ! And meanwhile let the listeners drink.

SOCRATES : I am filled with dismay.

CEBES : You are ? Why ?

SOCRATES : By this arrangement I shall have to speak last. That's a pretty look-out, if you like. Love is the only matter about which I profess to know anything, but what will be left for me to say when so many practised orators have praised the goddess ?

AGATHON : I am quite sure the goddess will inspire you.

SOCRATES : I wonder ! But first, Cebes, you will ask somebody to recite a hymn to her ?

CEBES : Yes, and then we'll pour a libation. Who will recite it ?

AGATHON : Euthenoe.

SEVERAL VOICES : Euthenoe !

CEBES : And the rest of us will repeat the refrain.

AGATHON (*to the* SLAVES) : Fill the cups.

[*The* SLAVES *fill the cups with wine and water.*

EUTHENOE *rises.*

EUTHENOE : Star-eyed, long-limb'd,
Rose-crown'd Aphrodite—
Goddess who measurest
Our worship by our joy—
Hear thou my petition
And prosper my love.

Prosper my love
That, dying, I may praise thee—
Glorious, all-powerful,
Deathless Aphrodite !

Glorious, all-powerful,
Deathless Aphrodite !

CEBES : The libation. . . .

[*They pour wine on the floor.*

Drink ! And meanwhile I will do my best before the most critical audience in Athens. . . . Love is a word that has more meanings than there are colours in the rainbow ; and it is not of the love between the sexes that I shall speak. No. I shall praise love because it is the noblest emotion that a man can feel ; and it is the noblest because it inspires him to the best actions that he can perform. His best actions, again, are those in which animal instinct has least part, and the origin of these actions is always love. Nothing else will fan the soul to a state of such glory that, overcoming nature, a man forgets his own interest and dares even to die for the benefit of another—love only, I say, can effect this miracle. And of that high-soaring and self-immolating love, is not Alcestis an example to all Hellas ? For without any struggle she laid down her life on behalf of her husband, when no one else would ; and the tenderness of her love so far exceeded that of his father and mother that she made them seem to be strangers to their own son, and in name only related to him. This, then, is the love which I extol : the love that like military music inspires to courage and all noblest actions, not contenting itself with words, but impelling a man to throw away his very life, if need be, for the person whom he loves—and to do so without calculation and as if by a superhuman instinct that obliterates all the mere self-preserving instincts which are imparted to the body when it is born.

[*Applause.*

CEBES : Having lighted the torch, I hand it on, Simmias, to you.

SIMMIAS : No action is, in itself, either good or evil, for what we do is good or evil according to our motive and the manner in which we act. Consider our present occupation—of drinking together. To drink heavily is evil, because the purpose of so doing is to submerge the intellect : but to drink in moderation is good and honourable, for we do so in order the more freely to exchange the best of our thoughts and feelings. Let me, therefore, distinguish the two kinds of love, the crude and the rare. A crude and vulgar lover is enamoured of the body, rather than the character or personality, of the beloved. He desires to take that which he wants, not to give that which the beloved lacks. He seeks, as it were, to drink so heavily of a physical pleasure that he will no longer suffer from a thirst for it. He loves that he may be rid of the pain of loving. And his passion is not only ignoble, but also, of necessity, impermanent, for he desires a thing which is itself impermanent ; and that is why, when the bloom of youth is over, he takes wing and flutters away, in spite of his promises and pretences. The rare lover, on the contrary, is in love with the soul : eagerly gives to the beloved or to a chosen friend whatever is best in his own mind or nature ; desires that their love may develop in each of them more wisdom, more sympathy, more fortitude ; and, valuing the goodness of the soul above the charm of the body, his affection will be life-long because it is directed to something which will endure as long as life. . . .

Cebes, I offer to you this contribution in praise of love, as the best that I can produce without preparation.

[*Applause.*

ARISTOPHANES *begins to hiccup.*

AGATHON : Well done, Simmias ! I know you don't like sitting up into the small hours, but it is worth doing if they inspire you to such eloquence. . . . Who is next ?

CEBES : Aristophanes.

ARISTOPHANES : I must beg you to (*hiccup*)—to grant me (*hiccup*)—a reprieve. Confound (*hiccup*) these hiccups. Eryximachus, you must either (*hiccup*) stop them or speak (*hiccup*)—in my turn.

ERYXIMACHUS : I'll do both. While I am speaking, hold your breath. . . .

ARISTOPHANES : Don't (*hiccup*) speak for long, then (*hiccup*).

ERYXIMACHUS : If that doesn't cure you, gargle with some water.

ARISTOPHANES : And (*hiccup*) after that ?

ERYXIMACHUS : Tickle your nose. Make yourself sneeze. That's the sovereign cure for the hiccups.

ARISTOPHANES : Don't charge me (*hiccup*) for this pre—(*hiccup*)—scription !

ERYXIMACHUS : Nobody will expect me, a mere doctor, to emulate the poetic style of our two young friends. My profession confines me to the prose of life. And in this company, which includes a tragic poet, a comic poet, and a philosopher who is famous for eloquence, I shall attempt no gorgeous rhetoric. . . . Unlike Cebes, I intend to speak of that love which arises from the great mystery of sex. And I would have you consider how great that mystery is. Do not suppose, as the vulgar do, that it is only living creatures that have two forms. The entire universe is held together by an interplay of opposites : the straight and the curved, the rough and the smooth, the hot and the cold, the active and the passive. Believe me, the anatomical differences between male and female are nothing but one

particular manifestation of that fundamental duality which includes every other opposing pair of which you can think. The world is sustained by a balance of opposing forces, and sex, in like manner, is the very basis of human life. The instinct which causes one sex to long for the other is directed toward harmonising both. If it fails, disaster follows. If love miscarries, the whole of a man's nature goes awry. Indeed, you can take it from me that nearly every malformation of the mind is due to a discord in the love-life of the sufferer, and that a discord in the mind is invariably followed and proclaimed by a discord, or disease, in the body.

[ARISTOPHANES *sneezes violently. Applause.*

Even a conflict within the nose may indicate certain obscure but definitely criminal inclinations—as, for example, a malicious desire to distract attention from the oratory of a brilliant rival. . . . No man, therefore, is better fitted than a doctor to praise love, for he knows that the health of the body depends upon the health of the mind, and that the mind can never become harmonious if the instinct of love does not achieve a full and joyous expression. . . . To Aristophanes, who appears to be cured, I submit the theme of discourse, adding a recommendation that he should go gently with the wine.

ARISTOPHANES : I rise a pure man, delivered—by the skill of Eryximachus—from all criminal inclinations, and with a nose that is now in perfect condition.

CEBES : Your speech, then !

[*While* ARISTOPHANES *is speaking,* EUTHENOE *falls asleep.*

ARISTOPHANES : Unaccustomed as I am—— (*Cries of derision.*) Unaccustomed as I am to

I could think of no reason whatever for praising love. . . . If custom had not hardened you to the sight of the human face, you would realise how grotesque it is. Indeed, if you had newly alighted upon this world, spiralling down from some more dignified planet, you would recognise that the whole human body is a joke perpetrated by the gods—and a joke which I, at least, consider to be in somewhat dubious taste. It is all very well to guffaw when you look at a hippopotamus or a giraffe, but what about yourselves? Try to see the human form as though you were inspecting it for the first time. What is the head, of which you incline to be so proud? A knob stuck perilously on the backbone, like an inverted flower-pot on a stake. And what of the face itself? Was it possible to invent a more fantastic object? Look, for example, at the face of our poor friend Eryximachus. What do you see? In the middle, a lump, a kind of handle or spout, which he calls a nose; on either side of the lump, a morsel of coloured jelly—his eyes; below the lump, a rent or gash—his mouth; to left and right, small tunnels drilled through pink side-pieces—his ears; and to crown this collection of queer shapes, a patch of discoloured turf—the unhappy fellow's hair. And what, again, of his body, if you could but regard it with unprejudiced eyes? What is it but a teetotum supported upon two stilts? . . . Why, then, do we tolerate the ridiculous forms which move about us? Why is it that, when we come to a certain age, we actually go almost frantic if we cannot clasp in our arms one of these manifestly absurd objects? We are the dupes of Aphrodite. Love leads us, not only to put up with the anatomy of the beloved, but even to affirm that it is beautiful; to see mystery in the two floating jellies, nobility in the central lump, and elegance

in the pair of stilts. I praise love, therefore, because it has promoted an age-long and world-wide illusion which enables human beings to consort together without collapsing in mutual derision. . . . This, Eryximachus, is my discourse of love, which I must beg you not to criticise with your usual brainless arrogance, because the night is waning, and before it has gone we wish to hear what Agathon and Socrates have to say.

ERYXIMACHUS : I cannot criticise your speech, my good man, because I have only just waked up. Besides, I am curious to hear what the last two speakers will find to say when so much has already been said.

SOCRATES : And well you may be ! Agathon, as we all learnt yesterday, is a charming speaker, and *he* will acquit himself with flying honours : but when he also has spoken, I myself shall be really in very dire straits.

AGATHON : Is that fair ? Is it fair that he should jeopardise my contribution by leading you to expect so much ?

SOCRATES : I was only thinking of the composure with which you walked on to the stage and confronted the whole audience of Athens without turning a hair. It would certainly be odd if I supposed that your nerves could now be fluttered by a small party of friends.

AGATHON : For shame, Socrates ! You don't think that my head is so turned as to make me forget how much more formidable a few good judges are than a multitude of fools ?

SOCRATES : How can you be more afraid of us than of them ?

AGATHON : Of course I am.

SOCRATES : But we were part of that foolish multitude. How can you be afraid of us to-night when yesterday you could have snapped your fingers at us ?

CEBES : Don't answer him, Agathon. We won't have him tangling you up with questions until you have paid your tribute to the goddess.

AGATHON : If I can keep our friend Eryximachus awake, I shall consider that I have had a triumph. . . . An elderly philosopher, whom nobody present will suppose to have been Socrates, declared the other day that we give love too large a place in our thoughts—the love, I mean, that arises from sex. He said that it should interest us only between the ages of seventeen and twenty-seven, and that we ought, after this period, to occupy ourselves with the really important business of life. . . . But let not the old or the middle-aged despise love as though it were a childish plaything, or suppose that when they have outgrown it they may look down, with an air of superiority, upon the young. Not so ! Love is the grand event, the chief purpose, and the apex of our lives. When we are no longer troubled and urged onward by the delicious unrest of that instinct, we are ghosts of men, we are nothing better than perambulating corpses, we are flotsam left high and dry on the bank by the hurrying river of life that carries the world along. What is it that a man most clearly remembers when he looks back at the bygone years ? Which part of his experience does he know to have been the most vivid and most valuable ? Not the time when he was amassing a fortune, or improving the drainage of a town, or nodding in the Senate while his fellow-senators drearily rambled on : not these, but the years when he was a soldier, defending Hellas, and all the ecstasy and anguish that he passed through when he was a lover. Youth is the kernel of life ; the residue, a mere husk. I say that when love is over, the rest of life is a tedious anti-climax, and that it would be better for the world if men, like bees and dragonflies, were ordained to perish when they

have touched their highest rapture. What could be more glorious than to be carried from life to death on the very crest of passion ? Who would willingly choose to linger for another forty years, pretending that the barley-water of middle-age or the gruel of senility is comparable with the sun-bright wine of youth ? Do not believe the old men. They are remnants of the feast. The purpose of living is to find beauty, to love beauty and from it to generate beauty, to the end that humanity may be worthy to dwell under a heaven of stars and that life may be an inheritance worth handing on to others.

[*A good deal of applause.*

It wakes EUTHENOE.

SOCRATES : What an admirable speech ! You will all agree now that I was a true prophet when I said that Agathon would leave me in a confoundedly tight corner ?

CEBES : Agathon spoke charmingly. You must do as well as you can.

SOCRATES : I really must beg to be excused.

SEVERAL : No, no, no !

SOCRATES : I am not a speaker—merely a talker. You ought not to invite an old man to your revels in order to make him look foolish.

AGATHON : You will never be old—not you !

CEBES : There's no escape. You must give us something to ponder on the way home.

SOCRATES : It is really most painful. Will you allow me, Cebes, just to ramble on, as I usually do, picking up any words that lie handy and not attempting to speak like a poet ?

CEBES : Speak as you wish.

SOCRATES : Well, Cebes, rather than be sent home ignominiously, I will obey your command to the best of my ability. . . . You all know that I am not an orator and have never been able

to make long speeches. I think, therefore, that I had better try to repeat to you something which I heard, many years ago, from the prophetess of Mantineia. For even in those days I was woefully aware of my ignorance, and so, visiting the prophetess, I had asked her to tell me what love is and for what purpose it exists. . .

" In the philosophy of love," she answered, " there are the lesser and the greater mysteries, and, if you are to understand them, Socrates, you must give me your closest attention. First of all, then, can you offer me any definition of love ? " . . . " Love," I suggested, " is a hunger for the beautiful." . . . " I will accept your definition," said the prophetess, " but it will not be of much use, I fear, unless we also define the meaning of beauty." . . . She paused for a moment, and then, as I made no reply, she continued : " Do we not say that a thing is beautiful when we recognise that it is as it ought to be and that we cannot wish it to be any better ? " . . . I agreed. . . . " Then," said the prophetess, " a thing is beautiful when it is as perfect as it can be ; and if love is a hunger for the beautiful, it is a hunger for perfection." . . . Again I agreed. . . . " And would you also agree," she asked, " that nothing is perfect when it is broken ? " . . . " Of course," I replied. . . . " Does anything in the world remain beautiful and unbroken for ever ? " she pursued. " Does not death break everything in the mortal world ? " . . . " It does," I answered. . . . " Then we can say," observed the prophetess, " that love is not only a longing for the beautiful, but for everlasting beauty, and is therefore a hunger for immortality." And when I had assented, she began her discourse. . . . " Most men," she said, " like birds and animals, are creative only in the body, and they betake themselves to beautiful women, and, being urged by a longing to possess that beauty, they beget children, hoping

mortal nature has tried, so far as it is able, to become deathless and eternal. And indeed, although in due time they perish, life itself, continually renewed by these physical lovers through many thousands of years, does become in a sense immortal. . . . Those, on the other hand, who are creative in the mind are also inspired by a longing to make something perfect and permanent in a world that is flawed and fleeting. And these men are not only those who build fair houses and temples, but also those who make wise laws, imposing upon society a beauty of orderliness and justice, and those too—the musicians and the poets—who create an intangible beauty which the mind embraces with as much delight as a physical lover feels when he unites himself with a shapely body. Whether, in short, their children are of the body or of the mind, all men, perceiving the beautiful, endeavour to assuage their hunger for perfection by creating something that shall be both permanent and perfect. . . .

" These are the lesser mysteries, into which even you, Socrates, may enter. I do not know whether you will be able to attain to the more hidden mysteries, but I will do my utmost to make them clear, and you must attain to them if you can. . . . Love, we have said, is a longing for the beautiful and the everlasting. That longing, however, is as infinite as the mind of man. It grows with the growing of the soul ; and that is why a complete experience of love can only be obtained laboriously and by degrees. When love first awakens within a youth he becomes aware that one human form is more beautiful than another. And the beginning of this long initiation is to love one such form only : but later, when he responds to beauty of form in general, how absurd he would be if he did not acknowledge that the beauty in all forms is one

and the same. He then abates his violent love of the one and becomes a lover of all forms that are beautiful. The next step, if he does not cease growing—as many do—is to recognise that a noble, energetic, and harmonious mind is more worthy to be loved than a comely form, and that personal beauty is a trifle. From this he will proceed to a perception of abstract beauty —the degree of perfection that is shown by wise government and a well-formed State ; and from this, again, he will go on to the beauty of science and philosophy, which alone can assuage a longing that has now invaded his intellect ; until at length, ever ascending under the influence of love, and progressing from one form to many, and from forms to fair actions, and from actions to fair thoughts, and contemplating the vast sea of beauty, visible and invisible, he will understand that all this time he has been hungering for something that is not in this world, but that lies beyond it, and he will apprehend the essence and idea of beauty as it existed, before time and space, in the divine imagination, and in this way he will have come to the end, and will find rest. . . .

" That, my dear Socrates," said the woman of Mantineia, " is the life above all others which a man should live—contemplating, with mind undistracted by the infirmities of the physical world, that supreme beauty which, itself indestructible and everlasting, imparts, without loss or any change, reflections of beauty to the forms, ever-growing and ever-perishing, of the visible universe : for in that contemplation the infinite longing of the soul for perfection will be assuaged, and the soul in that ecstasy will become the spectator of all time and all existence, and will realise for ever the immortal essence within itself and within everything that exists. . . ."

[*His speech is followed by a brief silence.*

EUTHENOE *is crying, but nobody notices her.*

ARISTOPHANES : We who are here shall always remember this night, Socrates. I could grieve a little that so few persons will ever know how lovely it was.

[*Outside, a confusion of voices. Somebody knocks on the door, back.*

AGATHON : Who can it be—at an hour like this ? (*To* EUTHENOE) If they are friends of mine, admit them. If not, say that the drinking is over.

[EUTHENOE *goes to the door and opens it.*

ALCIBIADES (*speaking off*) : No, I say—no ! *I* have a right to enter. The rest of you—go and sing to the moon !

[*Enter* ALCIBIADES, *wearing a garland of ivy and violets, with ribbons. He shields his eyes against the light.*

EUTHENOE *closes the door.*

AGATHON (*rising*) : Alcibiades !

ALCIBIADES : Friends—I am exceedingly drunk. Will you have a drunken man at your party or shall he go home ?

AGATHON : Stay with us.

SEVERAL : Sit here.

ALCIBIADES : I have come to crown Agathon in recognition of his victory. Curse your bright lamps ! Where is he ?

AGATHON : Here.

ALCIBIADES (*to* EUTHENOE) : Girl, guide me to your master.

[*He takes off his garland and, led by* EUTHENOE, *advances toward* AGATHON, *holding the garland before him on the level of his eyes.*

AGATHON : I did not invite you because I did not dare.

ALCIBIADES : What does that matter ? . . . My hands, you see, are steady enough to crown you—the last but not the least of our tragic poets.

[*He puts the garland on* AGATHON's *head.*

And now, for five minutes—until those rowdy fellows return to claim me—I appoint myself master of your ceremonies. . . .

CEBES : So be it.

ALCIBIADES (*to* AGATHON) : And I insist upon having the place of honour—upon sharing your couch.

AGATHON : It is taken already.

ALCIBIADES : Turn him out ! Who is it ? (*He looks round*) What ? Socrates ? I might have guessed it. Whenever I'm making a fool of myself, he turns up—like a figure of conscience. But I'll be avenged on him. Nobody shall say that I shirk my duty, and I know—seeing that Agathon and Cebes and Simmias are here, all young men —it is now my duty to warn them against him. Listen, listen—and I will tell you the truth about the strange being whom you have invited to your party.

SEVERAL : Do ! Tell us !

ALCIBIADES (*to* SOCRATES) : Or would you prefer that I should not tell the truth ?

SOCRATES : What prank are you up to now ? Haven't I always urged you to tell the truth ?

ALCIBIADES : Then I will. A long time ago we were soldiers together, serving in the Expeditionary Force that was sent into Macedon. You little know what a gruelling campaign it was ; and you cannot imagine how amazing was this man's power of endurance. When our food-supplies were cut off, he behaved as though food were entirely superfluous and eating a mere

if he was forced to, he could out-drink every man in the army ; and, marvellous to relate, nobody, either then or at any time, has ever seen Socrates drunk. . . . In that part of the world, too, the winters are really terrific. The rest of us were creeping about with our feet heavily swathed in felts and fleeces, but this extraordinary person marched on the ice, barefooted. . . . I wish you had seen him when our troops were flying before the enemy : just as you describe him, Aristophanes, in your comedy of *The Clouds*—calmly stalking along, like a pelican, and rolling his eyes in a manner so terrifying that the enemy dashed off in search of less formidable prey. . . . Yes, and that was the engagement in which I was supposed to have earned the prize for valour. I was badly wounded. If Socrates had not defended me, I should certainly have been killed on the spot, and never have lived to sacrifice a cock to Asclepios when at last I recovered my health. It was he who ought to have had the prize. I told the generals that ; but Socrates was more eager than *they* were that I should have it. And they gave it to *me* because of my rank and birth.

CEBES : You said you would warn us against him . . . ?

ALCIBIADES : I have not forgotten. I come to that now. He will think that I am poking fun at him, but he wished me to tell the truth. And the truth is that he is exactly like the busts of Silenus. . . .

SIMMIAS : No, no !

ALCIBIADES : Be silent, you infant ! I say that he is exactly like those busts of Silenus which you find in the shop of a statue-maker—those that hold flutes to their mouths. But the music that *he* makes is more seductive than any that can

come from the lips of a miserable flute-girl : and his only instrument is words. I have heard Pericles and many other great orators. Socrates is the only man who has ever moved me to tears. . . . Remember—those figures of Silenus are made to open, and inside them they have images of gods. When you open the apparently simple Silenus whom you have here, you will find in him divine and golden images of such fascinating beauty that you will forget about everything else in the world. I very soon realised that, if I did not close my ears against him, he would transfix me, and I should grow old, sitting at his feet. No one but he has ever made me ashamed of the life that I lead—and perhaps it is news to you that I am capable of such a feeling. That is the danger of associating with Socrates. He does not care a rap for wealth or power or success. And he will prove to you, both by words and by example, that he is right and the world wrong. With what result, if you do not act on my warning ? He will convince you that it is better to be good than to be successful, and by imitating him you will disappoint the hopes of your much more sensible parents, and end up by becoming as poor and unimportant as he. I warn you—if you wish to do well in the world, resist him with might and main. He and the world are at odds !

[ERYXIMACHUS *has fallen asleep. The others, excepting* SOCRATES, *cry out,* " Bravo ! Bravo ! "

At odds, yes. And no one can tell, Socrates, whether you were not too bold when you refused the journey to Salamis.

SOCRATES : At present, I think, the Athenians do not hate me enough to put me in prison. But they may—in time.

ALCIBIADES : Yes. Have a care. A little less plain-speaking, a little more diplomacy.

SOCRATES : I am too old now to change my manners.

[*Knocks are heard on the door, back, and cries from behind it of* " Come out ! " " Alcibiades ! "

ALCIBIADES : There they are—my unphilosophical companions. I'll leave you in peace. Take my advice, and sleep off your wine before the dawn comes. . . . Open the door.

[*A* SLAVE *opens the door. The cries increase.*

ALCIBIADES *goes out.*

CEBES : Sound advice. With Agathon's permission, I recommend you to follow it. The doctor, I see, has already forestalled us.

[CEBES *and* SIMMIAS *settle down to sleep.*

AGATHON *and* ARISTOPHANES *still struggle to keep awake.*

AGATHON : I never dreamed that the great Alcibiades would visit *my* house. How comic he is !

ARISTOPHANES : How tragic, you mean—like a palace that a king lets go to rack and ruin.

AGATHON : The truth is, I'm too drowsy to know exactly what I *do* mean.

SOCRATES : But is there, after all, such a big difference between tragedy and comedy ?

ARISTOPHANES : How do you mean ?

SOCRATES : A play is tragic when it moves us to pity and admiration ?

ARISTOPHANES : I should think so.

SOCRATES : Is it not the spectacle of a great spirit refusing to be little ?

ARISTOPHANES : Yes. . . . At least, I've no doubt you are right.

SOCRATES (*turning to* AGATHON) : And is a comedy something that makes us laugh ?

AGATHON : Of course.

SOCRATES : By showing us the follies and vanities of men ?

AGATHON : Just so.

SOCRATES : We laugh at a comedy because we are measuring folly and vanity against an ideal of wisdom and good sense ?

AGATHON (*drowsily*) : Probably, Socrates—I should think so.

SOCRATES : And we measure a tragic figure against the pettiness of the ordinary man ?

AGATHON : Yes.

SOCRATES : Then it seems that the tragic poet must have a sense of human littleness, and the comic poet a sense of human greatness. . . .

AGATHON : Perhaps.

SOCRATES : The man, therefore, who can write a good comedy should be able to write a good tragedy ?

AGATHON : Do forgive me, Socrates. I can hardly keep my eyes open, and your voice is coming to me on long, slow waves of sleepiness.

SOCRATES : Dear me, yes ! Aristophanes, Eryximachus, Simmias, Cebes—they have all dropped off. . . . And now you.

[*A cock crows outside.*

My dear boy, you are certainly in no fit state to argue.

[*He adjusts* AGATHON'S *position so that he shall sleep more comfortably ; then walks slowly toward the door, back.*

SOCRATES (*pausing in front of* EUTHENOE) : And hadn't *you* better get a nap, while you can ?

EUTHENOE : Are you going, Socrates ? Without having slept ?

Socrates : I shall go to the Lyceum, have a bath, and begin the day.

Euthenoe : They all think the world of you.

Socrates (*going*) : You must have found our talk very tedious.

Euthenoe (*shyly*) : No—not yours.

Socrates (*at the door*) : May your life be as happy, Euthenoe, as mine has been.

[*He goes out.*

She stays at the door, gazing after him.

SCENE III

PERSONS IN SCENE III

SOCRATES

XANTIPPE

MELETUS

ANYTUS

LYCON

CRITO

PHÆDO

A few days later. Noon.

The scene represents the courtyard round which the humble house of SOCRATES *is built.*

Back centre, a bench.
Right, another bench.
Door, back ; door, right.

SOCRATES *is seated on the bench at the back, mending a spare sandal. At his side, a duster with which he polishes the leather.*

Enter XANTIPPE, *his wife : a comely woman in the later thirties.*

XANTIPPE : Ah ! . . . So you are here !

SOCRATES : Even I, Xantippe, cannot call *that* statement into question.

XANTIPPE : Your dinner will be ready in three minutes.

SOCRATES : Very good.

XANTIPPE : The usual dinner.

SOCRATES : Excellent.

XANTIPPE : Is it ! If only you'd earn an honest living and make some money, like other men, we shouldn't have to eat bread and lentils, day in, day out.

SOCRATES : To want as little as possible is to live as nearly as possible like the gods.

XANTIPPE : Prate to your precious friends, but don't prate to me.

SOCRATES : We are both born talkers.

XANTIPPE : You were born selfish—and that's the trouble about you !

SOCRATES : I wonder . . .

XANTIPPE : Do you ever think of me or the children ? If you did, you wouldn't be so mad

as to set the Government against you. What am I going to do, I should like to know, if they bundle you into prison ?

SOCRATES : You will be better off.

XANTIPPE : And how, may I ask ?

SOCRATES : My friends are always offering money——

XANTIPPE : And you always refuse it !

SOCRATES : Exactly. You won't !

XANTIPPE : Do you want me to starve ? . . . As for your friends, I hate the whole lot of them—except Alcibiades. It's all very well for rich young men to waste their time argufying over a pack of nonsense. A poor man should leave that to his betters.

SOCRATES : I worked hard—in my youth.

XANTIPPE : And gave away all your earnings. I've no patience with you.

SOCRATES : I've noticed that.

XANTIPPE : If only you'd lose your temper. . . . It's like trying to kindle wet wood.

SOCRATES : Don't try.

XANTIPPE : Are you coming in ?

SOCRATES : Soon.

XANTIPPE : You will only get cold water.

SOCRATES : It is all I want.

[*A knock on the door, right.*

XANTIPPE : Who's that ?

SOCRATES : I've no idea.

XANTIPPE : If you stay here chattering, you may not get any dinner at all. Do you hear ?

[*She goes out, back.*

SOCRATES *opens the door, right.*

Enter MELETUS.

SOCRATES : Meletus ? . . . You surprise me.

MELETUS : May I ? Just for a minute or two ?

SOCRATES : Certainly. But three days ago you said that you'd never speak to me again.

MELETUS : A silly outburst. You were right and I was wrong. It was partly to say so that I came.

SOCRATES : And partly ?

MELETUS : To ask if I have taken too great a liberty in telling two of my friends to join me here ? They are eager to know you.

SOCRATES : My door is open to everyone. Who are they ?

MELETUS : Anytus the Tanner and Lycon the Orator. They are men of great promise in politics : and now, of course, they will have their chance.

SOCRATES : Why now ?

MELETUS : Surely you've heard ?

SOCRATES : I have not been out to-day.

MELETUS : Then it's I who can give you the splendid news ! The tyranny has fallen. The new democracy is in power.

SOCRATES : It means a new batch of exiles, I suppose. . . .

MELETUS : It means that you are out of danger.

SOCRATES : Yes. But I am sure to offend the new Government, just as I offended the old.

MELETUS : You have many staunch friends in Athens.

SOCRATES : My enemies are ten times as many.

[*A knock on the door.*

MELETUS : There they are. . . .

SOCRATES : My enemies ?

MELETUS : No, no, no ! Say, rather, your future friends.

[SOCRATES *opens the door.*

[*Enter* ANYTUS *and* LYCON.

MELETUS : So you've come . . . that's delightful. Here is Anytus the Tanner. . . .

[ANYTUS *and* SOCRATES *greet one another.*

And Lycon the Orator.

SOCRATES : Sit down. You are welcome.

LYCON : I am proud to become acquainted with you at last.

ANYTUS : And we all rejoice in your marvellous escape. (*Picking up the sandal*) Very poor leather, this.

SOCRATES : It belongs to a very poor man.

MELETUS : Poor by choice. With your reputation you could have made a fortune as a lecturer.

SOCRATES : A lecturer should know his subject. I know nothing.

ANYTUS : You will give me the pleasure of sending you a new pair of sandals. . . .

SOCRATES : I should welcome them.

LYCON : It is clear, however, that you are wondering why we have called upon you.

SOCRATES : I am.

LYCON : We are fervent democrats. . . .

MELETUS : We hold that democracy is the only form of government which is tolerable to self-respecting citizens.

LYCON : And we should be glad indeed if we might say that the great Socrates is of our opinion.

SOCRATES : One form of government is not better than another. Everything depends on the persons or the person in power.

MELETUS : But of course you approve the democratic principle ?

SOCRATES : Perhaps Lycon will tell me what it is ?

LYCON : Democracy is the government of men by their own consent. It is based upon universal respect for man.

ANYTUS : If every man is required to fight for his country, every man should have an equal voice in making his country worth fighting for.

MELETUS : Democracy means the end of privilege and oppression.

SOCRATES : How magnificent ! . . . I wonder, though, whether, in my usual manner, I may ask a few questions ?

XANTIPPE (*within*) : Socrates !

SOCRATES : It is only my wife announcing dinner.

LYCON : We must apologise. . . .

SOCRATES : I assure you, I would much rather talk than eat.

MELETUS : Then what are your questions ?

SOCRATES : So simple that I am almost ashamed to ask them. If you are fervent democrats, you must have found the answers a long time ago.

LYCON : Perhaps.

SOCRATES : I will begin with Meletus. Knowing me better, he will be more patient with my stupidity.

MELETUS : I am at your service.

SOCRATES : You specialise, I believe, in military matters ?

MELETUS : Yes.

SOCRATES : An army differs from a rabble ?

MELETUS : I should say so !

SOCRATES : By reason of its organisation and discipline ?

MELETUS : Yes.

SOCRATES : Every man in an army is a law to himself ?

MELETUS : Of course not.

SOCRATES : An army, then, is composed of privates and officers, and each man must absolutely obey the man above him ? It was so in my time.

MELETUS : It is so still.

SOCRATES : At the head of them all is one man ?

MELETUS : The Commander-in-Chief. Really, Socrates——

SOCRATES : Is he chosen by the whole army ?

MELETUS : No. By the Government.

SOCRATES : Have the rank and file any means of judging the capacity of a general ? Or, if the choice lay with them, would they choose the man who made them the most liberal promises ?

MELETUS : I daresay they would.

SOCRATES : And if you are at war, you want the best possible man to lead the army ?

MELETUS : Obviously.

SOCRATES : Or would it be wiser to ask five hundred generals to lead it ?

MELETUS : That would be absurd.

SOCRATES : In an emergency, then, you trust to one man : and you rely upon a few men to put him in control ?

MELETUS : Yes, but——

SOCRATES : And you agree with Anytus that if all men must fight for their country, all men should have a hand in its government ?

MELETUS : Undoubtedly.

SOCRATES : All men fight equally well ? Is that why they should have equal civil power ?

MELETUS : Well, no.

SOCRATES : And a plain soldier might be wiser in civil affairs than his general ?

MELETUS : Possibly.

SOCRATES : Then it does not seem sensible to give all men equal power, either in the army or in the State. . . . Anytus, you are a tanner ?

ANYTUS : I am.

SOCRATES : You have men who work for you ?

ANYTUS : Twelve.

SOCRATES : It was they who chose you to manage your business ?

ANYTUS : No.

SOCRATES : Really ? If they were free to choose, would they appoint the cleverest business-man or a man who would give them the highest wages and require the least work ?

ANYTUS : A shop is not a State.

SOCRATES : A State, however, is a shop.

ANYTUS : All this means that you do not believe in democracy ?

SOCRATES : I am trying to find out whether I ought to do so. . . . Now, Lycon, you will agree that trade is a complicated matter and that the management of an army is also complicated ?

LYCON : Certainly.

SOCRATES : The management of a State includes the control of trade and of the army and of a great many other things ?

LYCON : Of course.

SOCRATES : It is important that a State should be managed by its wisest men ?

LYCON : I agree.

SOCRATES : We cannot choose them by drawing lots ?

LYCON : No, indeed !

SOCRATES : But rather by giving a vote to every citizen ?

LYCON : Exactly.

SOCRATES : So that the stupid man shall have equal power with the wise man. And the result will be that the wisest of all is chosen ?

LYCON : We rely on the common sense of the people.

SOCRATES : A State is more complex than a shop or an army. I am sure you will assent to that. The rank and file, then—though not capable of managing a shop or an army—are somehow capable of managing the State ?

LYCON : What are you leading up to ?

SOCRATES : My difficulty in accepting your view. You see, if an army without a supreme head becomes a rabble, and if the cleverest man should control the output of any trade, I cannot understand how an entire State can best be governed by the whole populace. If everyone were as wise as the leader, they would require no leader. If they are not, they will obstruct his wisest actions because they will not appreciate him. A general who was chosen by the whole army would be powerless to do anything but what the whole army could understand.

MELETUS : Then you do not resent the oppression of the poor by the rich ?

SOCRATES : I don't think we have to choose between the poor and the rich, but between the wise and the foolish.

XANTIPPE (*within*) : Socrates !

SOCRATES : Xantippe can never believe that I prefer conversation to a dish of lentils. Excuse me a moment.

[*He goes out, back.*

MELETUS : Wasn't I right ?

LYCON : He's insufferable.

ANYTUS : Still, we've got what we wanted. We ought to be able to work up a good deal of animosity against him if he holds *these* views !

[*A knock on the door, right.*

MELETUS : He'll hardly escape a second time ! . . . Don't forget, though, we must make him confess now that in religion he is a sceptic.

[*Enter, right,* CRITO—*an old man—and* PHÆDO —*a youth.*

CRITO : Pardon me. . . . Ah, Meletus ? And Lycon, too ?

MELETUS : And Anytus. You all know Crito—at least by reputation. A great friend of our host.

CRITO : I have brought a young man to see him. Perhaps he is not at home ?

MELETUS : He is indoors—with Xantippe.

CRITO : Oh !

MELETUS : Exactly.

CRITO : I am surprised to see you here. I thought there had been a slight quarrel ?

MELETUS : His companionship is too good to be thrown away for a trifle.

CRITO : In that we agree.

[*Enter* SOCRATES.

SOCRATES (*to* CRITO) : My dear old friend !

CRITO : I came for two purposes. First, to congratulate you upon the fall of the tyranny :

second, to present Phædo. He has been one of your admirers—from a distance—for a long time.

SOCRATES : Come and see me whenever you wish.

PHÆDO : That would be very often.

SOCRATES : Good, good ! I am an old man, Phædo, and have no time to lose in the making of new friendships.

CRITO : I fear, though, that we came at an inconvenient hour ?

MELETUS : Not at all. We must be going. As a matter of fact, I was on my way to sacrifice in the Temple of Apollo.

ANYTUS : Be careful, or Socrates will laugh at you !

SOCRATES : I ?

ANYTUS : Everyone knows that your religious views are not orthodox. . . .

LYCON : I have even heard that you are an atheist.

SOCRATES : An old lie—invented, years ago, by the comedy-writers.

LYCON : You are not a sceptic, then ?

SOCRATES : We ought to turn out our minds every year, as we turn out our houses. To get rid of the rubbish.

LYCON : And what is the rubbish ?

SOCRATES : Ideas that are dead or decaying.

LYCON : Ah ?

SOCRATES : Each new generation supposes that it can act as it thinks best. In reality it is no more free than a prisoner, chained to a corpse. We drag along with us the dead weight of the past. Men wish for a better world, but the past refuses to give them up.

MELETUS : You have no respect for the past ?

SOCRATES : I would rather live in a new house than in one that was built to suit somebody else.

MELETUS : I see. . . . Well, my friends, we must go.

LYCON : Not without thanking Socrates for this bold expression of his views.

ANYTUS : I shall send you a new pair of sandals to-morrow.

[MELETUS, ANYTUS, *and* LYCON *go out.*

CRITO : Those fellows—don't trust them. They are up to mischief.

SOCRATES : I can afford to make a few enemies if I have made a new friend. (*To* PHÆDO) I have seen you practising in the gymnasium. You have a look of Plato when I first knew him. He was a young man then, writing poetry.

PHÆDO : I have often seen *you.*

CRITO : He was too shy to introduce himself.

SOCRATES : Am I so great as all that—and so alarming ? We must have many a talk in the future. But I hope Crito has warned you that I do not profess to teach anything whatever. I am only a hunter for truth.

PHÆDO : Let me hunt with you, that's all. I can't feel certain even that there is a God in the universe.

SOCRATES : Shall we try to find out ?

PHÆDO : Please !

CRITO : At the moment, I suspect, Xantippe is waiting for you to have your dinner. . . .

SOCRATES : Hardly " waiting," I think !

CRITO : I just wanted Phædo to understand that he can always go up and talk to you.

SOCRATES : He knows it now.

PHÆDO : Yes. And I thank you with all my heart.

CRITO : And, Socrates—be careful of those fellows. They are hypocrites.

SOCRATES : I should like to make friends of them also. . . . Good-bye.

CRITO and PHÆDO : Good-bye.

[CRITO *and* PHÆDO *go out, right.*

SOCRATES *returns to the bench, and becomes lost in meditation.* . . .

Enter XANTIPPE, *carrying a jug of water.*

XANTIPPE : What did I say ? Your dinner's ruined.

[SOCRATES *does not hear her.*

Think, think, think ! And what's the use of it all ? Why can't you live like an ordinary decent man ? . . . I say, your dinner's ruined !

SOCRATES : Eh ? It doesn't matter. I'll go without.

XANTIPPE : Oh, will you ! Well, you asked for cold water, and you shall have it !

[*She empties the jug over* SOCRATES' *head. He picks up the duster and dries himself.*

SOCRATES : Go indoors.

[*She stands irresolute.*

At once !

[*She goes out.*

How easy it is to be a philosopher—before marriage !

SCENE IV

PERSONS IN SCENE IV

A FAUN

A DRYAD

PHÆDO

SOCRATES

CRITO

SCENE IV

A grassy slope overshadowed by a lofty plane-tree. Late afternoon on a hot day.

Entrances, right and left.

A FAUN *is sitting against the trunk of the tree. His dappled body makes him hardly distinguishable from his background. He holds a reed-pipe upon which, now and again, he plays a few notes ; but his musical range is very primitive.*

Intermittently, throughout the scene, a noise of cicadas.

FAUN : Hot blue. . . . No cloud. . . . Earth asleep. But I cannot sleep. . . . I want, I want—something. . . . River, you are happy. Tall tree, you are happy. But I want, I want——

[*He plays on his pipe. Ceases. Shakes his head. Plays again.*

Presently a DRYAD *emerges from the tree, and creeps forward to inspect him. She is pale green and wears leaves.*

DRYAD : More ! . . . I like it.

FAUN : This is your tree ?

DRYAD : Yes.

FAUN : Pretty ! . . . I am from the forest, over there.

DRYAD : Strong arms. . . .

FAUN : And I have strong legs.

DRYAD : More music !

[*He plays again.*

DRYAD : Pan plays, too.

FAUN : Pretty, so pretty. . . . I want, I want——

DRYAD : I want, I want——

[*The* FAUN *strokes the shoulder of the* DRYAD.

FAUN : Smooth . . . (*lifting her hand*). Little . . . soft. . . .

DRYAD (*touching his arm*) : Like a stone. . . .

FAUN : I want——

DRYAD : I want—— (*Alarmed*) Listen !

[*They hear footsteps approaching.*

FAUN : Men-creatures !

[*The* DRYAD *vanishes back into her tree.*

I want—— What did I want ? . . . Hide away, hide !

[*He goes out stealthily. A moment's pause. Enter, from the opposite side,* PHÆDO *and* SOCRATES.

PHÆDO : There ! Admit that our walk was worth the trouble, in spite of the heat, when it brings us to such a lovely place.

SOCRATES : Your favourite haunt—of which you have told me so often !

PHÆDO : And having got you here, I'll allow you to rest.

SOCRATES : Everything is asleep, except the cicadas and you and I—and possibly Pan.

PHÆDO : Do *you* want to sleep ?

SOCRATES : And waste the beauty of summer ? Not I !

PHÆDO : You really are very strange. I suppose I have known you for a year now, but I've never met you outside the city walls.

SOCRATES : A tree should live among trees ; a man, among men.

PHÆDO : I'm not sure that I wouldn't rather have been born as a tree.

SOCRATES : Nonsense !

PHÆDO : Is it? I'm afraid I don't like men. What are they—most of them? Quarrelsome, petty-minded, completely self-centred. When a really great man is born among them, they can't rest until they have got rid of him.

SOCRATES : Was there no truth in the words of Sophocles?

> " *Wonders are many; yet than Man*
> *None more wonderful is there known;*
> *He that over the frothing sea*
> *Voyages, blown by the stormy South. . . .*"

You remember?

PHÆDO : The truth is, I am worried—about *you.*

SOCRATES : Me?

PHÆDO : This morning, on the steps of the Parthenon, I met old Crito. He is greatly perturbed. He says that Meletus—the vile rat!—is working up a widespread bitterness against you.

SOCRATES : He's been doing that for a long while.

PHÆDO : Crito thinks that it may come to a head to-day. He begged me to let him know where he could find you, in case there were any important news. I told him that we should be here till sunset.

SOCRATES : What charges could Meletus, or any of them, bring against me? Forget them, Phædo. It will all blow over.

PHÆDO : I wish I had more faith in the justice of the world and the triumph of good men. I have none. So far as I can make out, it is always the clever and plausible scoundrel who climbs into power. . . . Is there any sense, any direction, any purpose, in human life? Or is the whole universe the result of a blind collision of atoms? How can I think that there is any

intelligent direction behind the life of the earth when lingering and atrocious diseases torture those who are kind-hearted and blameless, and when so many hypocrites and rascals prosper? Nature herself is cruel, ruthlessly cruel—but only as a blind person who treads on an insect. Man is cruel with all the ingenuity of his complex brain.

SOCRATES: Do you hear the cicadas up there, chirruping so lustily in the branches?

PHÆDO: They? Why, yes.

SOCRATES: If one of them alighted upon your hand, what would he make of you? Certainly he would not be able to form any conception of the intricate being whose name is Phædo, and who at this moment is so troubled by the imperfection of our world. He could not even see your body as a whole. He would only know that he was perched upon something warmer and more vital than a twig of this plane-tree. Well, is it not possible that you and I are two cicadas—an old one and a young one—who have alighted, unawares, on the open palm of God's hand? . . . I do not think we can hope to catch the meaning of the universe.

PHÆDO: Is that why you never debate these mighty problems?

SOCRATES: Yes. The duty of a tree is to grow straight and strong. The duty of a man is to see that human life is so conducted that it may do us credit.

PHÆDO: And how many human beings care anything for the credit of humanity?

SOCRATES: Most of them care a little: some few, very much.

PHÆDO: No! You have spent your life in trying to make people think of something bigger than their contemptible little selves: and what is the result? They are plotting to suppress you.

SOCRATES : I am not afraid of my enemies.

PHÆDO : But I am. If the Athenians imprison you for life, Socrates, the world will never forgive them—never !

SOCRATES : A few years, and the world will be far too busy with new affairs to remember an old man who walked about Athens, trying to make good citizens.

PHÆDO : Then *I* shall never forgive them !

SOCRATES : And look ! As if to rebuke our pessimism about mankind, here comes an example of all the virtues !

PHÆDO : Crito ? . . . That means bad news.

[*Enter* CRITO.

SOCRATES : How charming of you to seek us out —and on such a hot day ! In the name of Phædo I welcome you to his country-seat.

PHÆDO : What news ?

CRITO : Bad.

SOCRATES : The world's not falling asunder ?

PHÆDO : Crito, what is it ?

CRITO : No laughing matter. I am seriously alarmed.

PHÆDO : Meletus, and the rest of them—is it they ?

CRITO : Socrates, they have lodged a formal indictment against you.

PHÆDO : There !

CRITO : When you get home this evening, you will receive a summons to attend at the law-court one day next week.

PHÆDO : But what are the charges ? What can they be ?

CRITO : I don't know. I understand that they

are exceedingly grave. Nobody thought that these fellows would dare to indict you : and naturally the whole of Athens is talking about " the trial of Socrates."

PHÆDO : So it *has* come ! There will be a formal trial. That will give him a chance to refute these calumnies once and for all. I'm glad. Can't you see who will win when it comes to a battle of words ? I can !

CRITO : My boy, it won't be a fair fight. That's the trouble. His enemies have poisoned the minds of a great many citizens. At least half the judges are convinced that Socrates aims at nothing but the destruction of the present social order.

PHÆDO : He is *bound* to get off.

CRITO : It could hardly mean death. . . .

PHÆDO : Crito !

CRITO : But it may mean exile or permanent imprisonment.

PHÆDO : Why don't you speak ?

SOCRATES : I was listening—listening to the voice that always directs me in the crises of my life.

PHÆDO : What did it say ?

SOCRATES : That I am not to prepare a speech in my defence.

CRITO : If you follow my advice you will not need to defend yourself.

PHÆDO : But he must !

CRITO : No. Public feeling, so far as I can judge of it, is divided about equally for and against you. We cannot risk an adverse verdict. We must see what money can do. I propose to raise a substantial fund from among your friends and to use it either to bribe the officials or, if they

dare not let you go, to hold it in readiness for the paying of whatever fine the judges impose.

PHÆDO : Count upon me—for what I am worth.

CRITO : Meanwhile, Socrates, you must allow me to try a bolder plan.

SOCRATES : What is it ?

CRITO : To spirit you away !

SOCRATES : From Athens ?

CRITO : Not for good. Only until the present excitement has cooled off.

SOCRATES : And whither will you spirit me ?

CRITO : To Thessaly. I have a farm there. I need hardly say that it is entirely at your disposal.

SOCRATES : We were right, Phædo. Here's a staunch friend indeed.

CRITO : We shall all be able to visit you at one time or another. It is only a week's journey.

SOCRATES : So I am to run away from my fellow-citizens ?

CRITO : Run away ? Who wouldn't—from a pack of wolves ? I implore you to realise the peril of your position.

SOCRATES : I do.

PHÆDO : And remember—we want you.

CRITO : I could never argue with you about philosophy, but I think I have learned a little about the ways of the world. In this matter I beg you to put yourself in my hands.

PHÆDO : You will ?

SOCRATES : Crito—I shall not leave Athens.

CRITO : Why ? Why ?

SOCRATES : I have nothing to be ashamed of. You must allow me to face them all in the law-court.

CRITO : Can't I say anything that would make you think it over ?

SOCRATES : My mind is made up.

CRITO : To be tried—like a criminal !

SOCRATES : You talk as though I were certain to lose. But what if I—or, rather, the truth itself—should triumph ? Yes, when my troubles are over, I will do as a man does when he recovers from a dangerous illness. I will sacrifice a cock to Asclepios, the god of healing !

CRITO : When your troubles are over. . . .

SOCRATES : My thanks for your kindness.

CRITO : If only you would !

SOCRATES : Impossible.

CRITO : Well, there is no time to lose. I must go and see Simmias and Cebes. Plato will certainly help. I wish that villain Alcibiades had not gone over to the Persians ! . . . Shall we start ?

SOCRATES : Phædo and I will follow you very soon. We are just in the middle of certain speculations that interest me profoundly.

PHÆDO : We can't go on talking—now !

SOCRATES : *I* can. And surely you won't leave me to carry on our debate with this unresponsive tree ?

CRITO : Very well, then. I shall go now. . . . I wonder if Xenophon is at home ? . . . And I will come to your house a little after sunset. You will probably know, by that time, exactly what the charges are.

PHÆDO : But really——

SOCRATES : My dear boy, sit down. . . . Xantippe will have a shock when those officers arrive. . . . Till we meet, Crito !

CRITO : I shall not fail. And remember, my plan is still possible.

[*He goes out.*

SOCRATES : Phædo, we were becoming much too melancholy. A friend like that makes the world seem more than tolerable.

PHÆDO : I can hardly realise what is going to happen.

SOCRATES : Since we may have not many years, or even days, in which to talk together, let us turn again to the problem that so much perplexed us.

PHÆDO : I can think of nothing but this calamity.

SOCRATES : Then wake up, my fellow-cicada—wake up and remember what little creatures we are. Phædo and Socrates are sitting under a plane-tree. The plane-tree is on the top of a little hill. The hill is about a mile from Athens. Athens is a corner of Hellas. Hellas itself is a tiny jewel in the big ball of the world. The world is a toy globe revolving about the sun. And the sun is a glowing speck in a dazzling multitude of stars.

PHÆDO : It may mean ruin.

SOCRATES : And now imagine the great desert of time over which humanity has marched : and how humbly the human race began. For numberless ages there was little difference between men and animals. But should we not pluck up our courage, and hope bravely for our kind, when we compare what we are now with what we were at first ? Will you not admit that Athens is a beautiful city ? So, too, are the other cities of Hellas which I visited when I was a young man. Have we not poets and sculptors of whom we can be proud ? And physicians, too, and engineers and architects ? And is there

not a mighty gap between the brutal and terrified savage of antiquity and that wise and just ruler Pericles, who, in my middle manhood, conducted our public affairs ? Tell me, Phædo, is not our life in Athens a not unpleasant and not ignoble life ?

PHÆDO : We have left much evil behind us.

SOCRATES : Yes—and the world is still young. We have almost everything to learn. What, then, will the world be like in another two thousand years ? Can we not assume that each generation will bequeath new knowledge to the next ? And if so, does it not follow that in those days the inhabitants of the earth will look back upon us as we look back upon the beast-men huddling in their caves ? If we, who are only at the beginning of the story, have built magnificent temples and gracious cities, must not the cities of our far-off descendants immeasurably surpass in beauty the best that we can achieve or imagine ? The people of that age will be strong, beautiful, gentle-hearted, and just. The wise will rule, and the multitude will gladly accept the mild yoke of the best and noblest citizens ; and the men of this world will no longer struggle against each other, as if the earth were a den of cut-throats, but will long since have learned to pull in unison at the oars which carry the ship of humanity forward. . . . Indeed, I would give much to see the world as men will have made it when you and I and Meletus have been dead and forgotten for two thousand years.

PHÆDO : Perhaps we *shall* see it—if Pythagoras hit the truth.

SOCRATES : In another life. . . . That may be. But look—the sun is falling ; and Crito, I fancy, told me that I am to have some visitors this evening.

PHÆDO : Visitors !

SOCRATES : Phædo, do you not think that we ought to say a prayer, seeing that we have been happy under this tree ?

PHÆDO : I think we ought.

SOCRATES (*after a moment's thought*) : Beloved Pan, and all you other gods that abide in this place—give me beauty of the inward self ; and may the outward and the inward man be at one. . . . Anything more ? The prayer, I think, is enough for me.

PHÆDO : Friends should have everything in common, and I pray the same prayer.

SOCRATES : Home, then—to Athens !

[*They go out.*

The FAUN *enters, and pipes disconsolately to the tree.*

SCENE V

PERSONS IN SCENE V

LYCON

ANYTUS

MELETUS

AN OFFICER OF THE COURT

SOCRATES

CRITO

Mute : Phædo, Simmias, Cebes, Court Attendants, and Two Soldiers

SCENE V

Only the front part of the stage is used. The scene represents part of an open-air law-court, the greater portion of which is to be imagined as existing in the auditorium of the theatre.

Back centre, a semi-circular bench on which are seated PHÆDO, CRITO, SOCRATES, SIMMIAS, *and* CEBES. *At each end of the bench stands an armed* SOLDIER. *Right, seated, an* OFFICER OF THE COURT. *Left, a bench for three. At present it is occupied by* ANYTUS *and* MELETUS. *Down stage, centre, a rostrum. When the* CURTAIN *rises,* LYCON *is on the rostrum, finishing a speech to the judicial assembly—which numbered more than five hundred. The audience in the theatre represents the bulk of this assembly, but other members of it are to be imagined as sitting, off stage, left and right.*

LYCON : Men of Athens, you have heard me patiently, and I thank you. If your sons had eaten poisoned food, what man among you would hesitate to adopt drastic measures ? I say that your sons have eaten poisoned words, and that it is Socrates who has inflamed and imperilled their minds. Do not be lenient toward him because he is old. I can assure you that he has it in him to do as much evil now as at any time in his life. I have diagnosed the danger. It is for you to apply the remedy !

[*He leaves the rostrum and sits on the bench, left.*

ANYTUS *mounts the rostrum.*

ANYTUS : I need not say much. I will only say that we have acted out of love for our country. Socrates pretends that he is a simple and humble man, but the truth is that he considers himself to be the wisest man in Hellas—not, mark you, merely in Athens, but in the whole of Hellas—and that is to say, in the world ! But, as Meletus observed in his speech to you, we must judge

of a tree by its fruit. And what effect has this wise man had upon the characters of those who admire him? Disastrous! Do you need proof of it? The proof is all too recent. Where is Alcibiades?

[*The name is followed by an angry murmuring and by shouts of execration.*

Alcibiades, whom our city recalled from exile —having once before deserted Athens and joined her enemy Sparta—has again betrayed us, as you all know, and has put himself at the service of the Persian Empire. (*Renewed murmuring.*) Men of Athens, Alcibiades was not only a disciple of our "philosopher"; he was, in his youth, our "philosopher's" favourite disciple. So much for the influence of the wisest man in the world!

[*He leaves the rostrum and joins* LYCON. MELETUS *mounts the rostrum.*

MELETUS: We come to the conclusion of our disagreeable task. You have heard from Lycon, Anytus, and myself the reason of our bringing this indictment. Let me then summarise the charges. We affirm that Socrates is guilty of questioning our national religion; that he is an over-curious person who teaches new doctrines concerning the structure of the universe; and that he is, in general, an evil-doer who corrupts the mind of the younger generation by persistently making the worse appear the better cause. . . . And one last word! He has gained this influence over young men by his eloquence. When he addresses you, be on your guard! But, indeed, why should I warn an assembly which is composed of mature men, not of inexperienced boys? I am confident that you will detect, under his easy command of language, the lack of substance in what he will say to you, and its pernicious trend. . . . Athenians, I implore you to safeguard your children.

[*He leaves the rostrum and goes back to the bench, left.*

The OFFICER OF THE COURT *rises.*

OFFICER : Judges assembled, you are to hear the speech of the defendant.

[SOCRATES *mounts the rostrum.*

SOCRATES : Men of Athens, in the course of caricaturing me so extravagantly, my accusers have told you a great many lies. One of these, however, really did amaze me. I mean that final suggestion that you ought to be on your guard against my eloquence. To say that I am eloquent was a bold lie indeed, for it was bound to be exposed the moment that I opened my mouth. No : you must bear with me if I speak without grace or majesty. To do so has always been quite beyond me. Moreover, I have prepared no speech. A spiritual voice, which I revere, forbade me to consider what I should say to you : and if I speak lamely, I would ask you to remember that, appearing now—at the age of seventy—for the first time in a court of law, I am not a little bewildered. I, then, will try to speak only the truth. May my judges decide the case justly !

Meletus declares that I propound strange theories concerning the structure of the universe. The fact is that I have never had anything to do with scientific speculations. All *that* is an invention of the comic poets. And, fortunately for me, many of those present can witness to the truth of this. To them I appeal.

[*He glances to right and left. Cries of assent.*

SOCRATES : You hear their answer. Next, I want to rebut the allegation that I deny the basis of our national religion. Meletus, do you still maintain this ?

MELETUS : Emphatically.

SOCRATES : Do you mean that I deny the existence of any God ?

MELETUS : I do. I say that you are an out-and-out atheist.

SOCRATES : Really, you know—nobody will believe you, and I am pretty sure that you do not believe it yourself. Have you ever heard that I claim to be directed by a divine voice ?

[MELETUS *does not reply.*

If you dare not answer, I must answer on your behalf. Everyone knows that it is so, for I have never made a secret of the matter. How, though, could I believe in a divine voice if I did not believe in a divinity ? The accusation of atheism is ludicrous ; and you put all that nonsense into your indictment because you could think of nothing else. Isn't that true ?

[MELETUS *does not reply.*

Well, what do you say ?

MELETUS : I am not here to argue, and I refuse to do so.

SOCRATES : Very good. Then I will ignore you and address myself to the judges. . . . I daresay some of you are thinking, " No doubt, Socrates, you have quickly demolished two of the charges against you, but you must have been up to some queer tricks or this indictment would never have been framed. No smoke without fire ! " Isn't that what you are thinking ? Now I fancy that I can explain my unpopularity, but I want you not to interrupt me if I say something which at first may sound a little vainglorious. . . .

I am supposed to be wise. Many of you will have heard the story of a certain Athenian who went, a long time ago, to the oracle at Delphi, and how, in answer to his question, the prophetess declared that there was no man wiser than Socrates. . . .

[*Cries.*

Remember, I stipulated that you should not interrupt me. . . . Well, when I heard this answer, I said to myself, " What can it mean ? For I know that I have no wisdom, much or little." I therefore sought out various men who were considered to be wise. I began with an eminent politician. But after I had put a few questions to him, in my usual way, I could not believe that he had any wisdom at all, though he thought that he had. So I explained to him, as well as I could, that he was not really wise and that he only deceived himself. But, strangely enough, he was not grateful to me for showing him his error. On the contrary, he became indignant, and he hated me ever afterwards. . . . I next went to a celebrated scientist. He told me exactly how everything is constructed—from a windflower to the Milky Way itself—and proceeded to assure me that the notion of human immortality is a fairy-story fit only for nursemaids. I asked him also a few questions, but he immediately flew into a rage ; and ever since then he has walked about Athens complaining that I am a tiresome busybody. . . . Finally I pursued my quest among the artisans. I realised that I knew nothing at all, and I was sure that they knew many fine things. And so they did. They taught me a great deal about many matters of which I was quite ignorant ; but I found, to my disappointment, that they—like the scientist—believed that a little knowledge of material things empowered them to give confident judgment upon spiritual issues.

How was I, then, to interpret the puzzling oracle ? If I am supposed to be wise it is because my audience invariably assumes that I possess the wisdom which I show to be lacking in others. But the truth is that God only is wise, for God only can see the whole universe at once. I believe, then, that the oracle was not singling out Socrates, but merely using me by way of

illustration—as though, in fact, it had said, " He is the wisest who, like that man Socrates, knows at least that his wisdom amounts to nothing." The origin of the outcry against me is that I have spent my life in trying to convince people that they have no certain knowledge about anything : for, instead of being angry with their ignorance, they have nearly always been angry with me. I have made enemies by my plain-speaking, and this is what will bring about my destruction, if I am to be destroyed. Envy and injured pride have been the death of many innocent and clear-minded men. They will certainly be the death of many more, in the ages to come. There is no chance of my being the last. . . .

I am charged, too, with having corrupted the young. In what way have I corrupted them ? I do not give lectures for money. Anyone, rich or poor, may ask and answer me : and his character——

[*Cries of* " Alcibiades ! "

His character, I say, cannot be the result of my teaching. . . .

[*A voice :* " Why not ? "

For the very good reason that, since I know nothing, I have never attempted to teach any doctrine. If any person present is ready to say that he has heard anything from me in private which all the world has not heard, let me tell him plainly that he is a liar. All that I have done is to go about exhorting you all, young and old, not to take thought for your persons or your property, but, before everything else, to care about the bettering of your lives. That is my only teaching, and if this be the doctrine that has corrupted the youth of our city, I am admittedly a mischievous person. . . . I say to you : Men of Athens, kill or acquit me ; but understand that I shall not alter my ways—and would

not though I had to die many times. A man who is worthy to be a man does not choose between life and death, but only between right and wrong. If you still entertain a suspicion that I have exerted an evil influence upon the young men who have associated with me, I ask you—where are the witnesses ? The strongest witnesses must be the parents and kinsmen of those whom I am said to have injured. Many of them are present—Crito, who put his son in my charge, and Aristogeiton, who is Plato's elder brother, and a good many more. Why did not Meletus produce them to witness against me ? He knew very well that they would all turn out to be witnesses for the defence. Indeed, if there is anybody here who will assert that I have misguided his son, I invite him to come forward and to argue the matter in open court. . . . Nobody takes up my challenge, and I suggest therefore that the charge is absurd and merely vindictive. . . .

Sometimes a defendant in this court will bring his children before the judges, hoping to play upon their compassion. I have three sons, but I do not intend to parade them here. You, my judges, have sworn to administer justice ; and to appeal to your emotions, not to your sense of what is right, would amount to an attempt at making you ignore your solemn oath. If I did that, then indeed I should convict myself of treating religion with contempt. But the truth is far otherwise. I do believe that there is a God, but in a sense higher than that in which my accusers believe it. And to you and to God I commit my cause, to be determined by you as is best for you and me.

[*He leaves the rostrum and returns to the bench, back.*

Officer : Judges assembled, you are now to record your votes.

[*A slight stir among the group round* Socrates.

The members of the opposing group confer. ATTENDANTS *dismantle the rostrum and take it away, bringing in its place a table formed like two trays joined together.*

The OFFICER *stands behind this table. From time to time, at short intervals,* ATTENDANTS *hurry to him, bringing bundles of votes which have been recorded on strips of bark.*

The OFFICER *inspects a mark on each bundle and announces the progress of the voting.*

Enter ATTENDANT.

OFFICER : Guilty, 36. Not guilty, 53.

[*Brief pause.*

Guilty, 87. Not guilty, 89.

[*Brief pause.*

Guilty, 178. Not guilty, 112.

[*Brief pause.*

Guilty, 225. Not guilty, 140.

[*Brief pause.*

Guilty, 250. Not guilty, 201.

[*Brief pause.*

Guilty, 264. Not guilty, 214.

(*To* ATTENDANT) : The last ?

[ATTENDANT *nods.*

OFFICER : Guilty, 280. Not guilty, 220. . . . The verdict of the court is " Guilty." . . . Meletus, in accordance with our laws, you are to propose to the judges assembled whatsoever punishment you consider to be fitting.

[MELETUS *hurriedly consults with* LYCON *and* ANYTUS. *He stands up.*

MELETUS : I pray that the prisoner shall be sentenced to death.

[*He sits down.*

OFFICER : Socrates, in accordance with our laws, you may propose to the judges assembled any alternative sentence which you consider to be an adequate punishment for the crime of which they have found you guilty.

[CRITO *and* CEBES *make a suggestion to* SOCRATES. *He shakes his head. He approaches the table at which the* OFFICER *is now seated.*

SOCRATES : I believe I may speak from here ?

OFFICER : Yes. But you will be under guard.

[*The* TWO SOLDIERS *advance and take up positions right and left of* SOCRATES.

SOCRATES : Men of Athens, there are several reasons for my not being distressed by this vote of condemnation. I expected it, and I am only surprised that the votes are so nearly equal. . . . Meletus has proposed death as a penalty. What shall be my counter-proposal ? Obviously something that fits the case. . . . I have striven, throughout a long life, to persuade you that virtue and wisdom are the true aims of man. Surely, then, this effort is worthy of some reward ? I therefore propose, as an alternative to the death-penalty, that for the rest of my days I should be comfortably, though not luxuriously, supported by the State. . . .

[*Indignant murmuring.*

Or, if you believe that the penalty ought to be a fine, what shall I say ? If I had any money, I might have estimated the supposed offence in terms of what I was able to pay ; but I have no money, and so it is fruitless to talk about a fine. . . . Well, perhaps I could offer you five pounds ? . . . Yes, I will propose that the penalty shall be a fine of that sum . . .

CRITO : Five hundred !

SOCRATES : My friends bid me say five hundred, and that they will be my surety. What is your answer ?

[*A storm of indignant cries follows this flippant treatment of the court.*

OFFICER : Do you call for a show of hands ?

SOCRATES : No. . . . You reject my offer ?

[*Cries of* " Death ! "

SOCRATES : You confirm the sentence proposed by Meletus ?

[*Cries of assent.*

Well, I am far advanced in years, as you may perceive, and so close to the boundary of human life that, if you had waited a little while, your desire would have been fulfilled in the course of nature. . . . To you that have made yourselves my murderers, I will not say much : only, in fact, that you are killing me because, rather than examine your consciences, you wish to get rid of your accuser. That is not a way of escape which is possible or honourable. The only right way is not to extinguish the lives of your fellow-citizens, but to amend your own. . . . Friends who acquitted me, stay a little—while the magistrates are busy—for we may as well talk with each other while we still can. I think that if we look into the matter, we shall see that death is not a misfortune : for either it is a state of complete unconsciousness or it is a migration of the soul from this world to another. Now, if death is an untroubled sleep, then eternity is only a single night in which we shall be exempt from all suffering : but if, on the contrary, it is a journey to some other region, where the dead exist, is it not a change, my friends and judges, from which indeed no man need shrink ? What would not a man give to be able to converse with Orpheus and Hesiod and Homer ? That

would be an interest worth dying for many times ; and already I look forward to the delight of interrogating the leader of the great expedition to Troy, and Odysseus, and Achilles, and innumerable others, men and women, too. . . . So I bid you be of good cheer about death, and exhort you to feel certain that no evil can befall a good man, either in life or beyond it. In fact, I see clearly that the time has come when it is better for me to die and to rest from trouble. That, no doubt, is why the inner voice never directed me to resist, except half-playfully, the end which has now come to me. For this reason, too, I am not angry with those who have brought about my end. They have done me no harm—though I realise that they did not mean to do me any good. And for that I may gently blame them. . . . The hour of departure has arrived, and we must go our ways—I to die, you to live. Which is the better, only God knows.

[CRITO *and the others advance towards him, but the* SOLDIERS *sign them away and lay hands on* SOCRATES.

LAST SCENE

PERSONS IN SCENE VI

SOCRATES (aged seventy)
CRITO
THE JAILER
SIMMIAS
CEBES
PHÆDO
XANTIPPE and
TWO CHILDREN

SCENE VI

The prison.

A strong door, right.

In the back wall, high up, barred windows. The light of a late afternoon in May comes through them.

Back centre, a pallet. SOCRATES *is reclining upon it. His ankles are chained together. Here and there, wooden stools. On one of them sits* CRITO.

Through the windows CRITO *and* SOCRATES *hear someone, at a distance, playing an air upon a reed.*

CRITO (*after a pause*) : Does that fellow annoy you, Socrates, blowing his reed out there ? I could easily stop him.

SOCRATES : I like it. . . . Some goatherd, I suppose, with half an hour to idle away in an orchard.

CRITO : My dear friend, if only you had agreed to my plan ! There's not the least doubt that we could have managed your escape. Money can do a great deal ; and I, as you know, have plenty. Others were just as eager to contribute whatever was necessary. Plato, for example.

SOCRATES : Handsome, brilliant Plato ! . . . He is ill, they tell me.

CRITO : Otherwise he would be here—to say good-bye.

SOCRATES : If he remembers me in his writings, the men of the future may also remember me.

[*The reed-music ceases.*

CRITO : But why—why did you refuse ?

SOCRATES (*mischievously*) : To escape ? I *shall* escape—this evening.

CRITO (*rising*) : What ? Who can get you away now ?

SOCRATES : The good fellow who brings me the hemlock.

CRITO (*astonished*) : The jailer ?

SOCRATES : An hour more, and I shall escape at last from this old and unlovely body.

CRITO (*slowly realising the truth*) : I see, I see. . . .

[*He sits again.*

SOCRATES : If I had agreed to your plan, I should not have been playing fair. What would my enemies have said—they, and all honest men ? " Socrates," they would have said, " you have lived in Athens for seventy years, protected by her fleet and enjoying the society of her citizens. Yet now, after seventy years, you run away, and go back upon your agreements ! "

CRITO : That *you* should be put to death !

SOCRATES : I have been a gadfly biting the conscience of my fellow-citizens.

[*The reed-music begins again.*

Enter the JAILER, *followed by* SIMMIAS *and* CEBES.

SOCRATES : Simmias—and Cebes ! Welcome, welcome ! There is no need for such long faces.

[*They sit down.*

JAILER (*to* CRITO) : May I speak to you, sir ?

CRITO : Me ?

JAILER : Just a moment—outside.

[CRITO *follows the* JAILER *out.*

CEBES : You don't find that music depressing—at a time like this ?

SOCRATES : I envy the boy who is making it. Do you know I have had the same dream several times, a dream that commanded me to cultivate music. The best that I could do was to write verses.

[*The reed-music ceases.*

SIMMIAS : We heard about that.

CEBES : Yes, and only two days ago I met a young poet who seemed to be quite upset by the news.

SOCRATES : Really ? Assure him that I am no dangerous rival—in fact, not a poet at all. For one thing, I never had any invention—so the best that I could do was merely to versify some of Æsop's fables. But it helped to pass the time in prison.

CEBES : Is *that* what you've been doing !

SOCRATES : Tell your young poet that I am setting out on a long journey, at the instigation of the Athenians, and that, just as I have been following his example, so, if he is a wise man, he will follow mine. Recommend him to come after me !

CEBES : He will never take that journey until he must.

SOCRATES : A true philosopher will always be ready to die : though he must not take his own life. Why does anyone kill himself ? If he could realise how unimportant he is, he would understand that his troubles are unimportant, too.

[*Enter the* JAILER *and* CRITO.

JAILER : Socrates, it is the custom here for a prisoner, during his last hour, to be freed of his chains. I have orders to remove yours.

SOCRATES : Good news ! They hurt me a little.

[*The* JAILER *proceeds to unlock the chains.*

It is natural enough for children to behave as though there were no world beyond the world of their nursery. Grown-up people ought to appreciate their insignificance. The welfare of humanity is all that matters—not the success or failure of Simmias or Socrates.

[*The* JAILER *holds the chains in his hand.* SOCRATES *rubs his legs.*

JAILER (*to* CRITO) : Remember.

CRITO : Very good.

[*Exit* JAILER. SOCRATES *puts his feet to the ground.*

SOCRATES : Come—I beg you all—be more cheerful.

CEBES (*softly*) : Cheerful ?

SOCRATES : Yes. For when I said that a philosopher should always be willing to die, the truth is that I did not say enough. He should actually welcome death.

CEBES : Tell us just what you mean.

SOCRATES : Very well, I will. After all, it is quite fitting that I should talk to you of my journey and my destination. Indeed, how could I better employ the time between now and the setting of the sun ?

CEBES : Death certainly does not seem to scare you.

SOCRATES : Did the Athenians fancy that they could terrify with a bogey ? . . . First of all, though, I must let poor Crito speak. He has been wanting for a long time to say something.

CRITO : Only that the jailer, who is to give you the hemlock, wishes me to warn you against talking much. He says that prisoners who excite themselves have sometimes to take a second or even a third dose.

SOCRATES : Tell him to prepare three doses.

CRITO : I knew you would make fun of it, but I promised to warn you.

SOCRATES : Never mind the jailer. . . . Let me show you, if I can, why you ought to rejoice for me rather than lament. Is not death the separation of the soul from the body ? . . . Well, Simmias ?

CEBES : *I* will answer you. Yes, it is.

SOCRATES : And, whatever happens after that change, we may feel certain that the soul will have to go without the pleasures of eating, drinking, wearing fine clothes, dalliance with the beloved, and so on and so on ?

CEBES : Undoubtedly.

SOCRATES : For these are pleasures that pertain to the senses. Now do you consider that the senses are trustworthy guides to the truth ?

CEBES : No. They mislead us absurdly.

SOCRATES : And does a philosopher desire to find out the truth ?

CEBES : What else ?

SOCRATES : And his body is a source of distracting appetites, ridiculous misjudgments, and fooleries of all kinds ?

CEBES : Yes.

SOCRATES : Well, surely a lover of wisdom is always trying to correct the mistakes of the senses, to ignore the infirmities of the body, and to control its wild passions ?

CEBES : That is his aim.

SOCRATES : So that while he is living in his body he is doing his best to live as though it did not hamper and confine him. In a sense, therefore, he is for ever anticipating death. And, that being so, would he not be absurd indeed to resent the removal of the very thing which he is continually struggling to subdue ? A philosopher may well hope that when death has removed his body and all its illusions, he will get a little closer to a vision of things as they really are.

[*A pause.*

I see I have not convinced you. Tell me where I went wrong.

CEBES : I don't like to say what is in my mind—considering the circumstances.

SOCRATES : Then, Simmias, you must be spokesman for yourself and for Cebes.

SIMMIAS : I share my friend's feeling ; but as you want us to explain our silence—I will.

SOCRATES : What is the good of a friend if you do not speak from the heart ? And I am a friend to both of you.

SIMMIAS : The fact is that, as we were walking here, Cebes and I began to debate the existence of the soul. I have to admit that I am more than doubtful whether the personality of a man survives his death.

CEBES : Most men are, don't you think ?

SOCRATES : Yes, and no wonder ! For in the nature of things there could be nothing more difficult to prove. But what do you say ? Shall we try our luck in a final argument—the last of so many ?

SIMMIAS : If you are willing—yes.

CRITO : Somebody is coming. Probably Phædo. He told me he would be here.

[*Enter the* JAILER, *followed by* PHÆDO.

SOCRATES : And so it is. In the nick of time, Phædo !

PHÆDO : Dear Socrates !

SOCRATES : Sit close to me—here. It is more than likely that I shall need your help.

PHÆDO : Mine ?

[*He sits on a stool beside* SOCRATES, *who, from time to time, plays with his curly hair.*

SOCRATES : Simmias and Cebes and I are not certain that the soul of a man can exist after death. We are going to argue the matter and follow the argument wherever it leads.

PHÆDO : But now ?

SOCRATES : Now or never !

PHÆDO : How like you !

SOCRATES : And on this occasion, not even my old enemies, the comic poets, could say that I am talking about matters which do not concern me.

PHÆDO : I have no longer any doubt on the subject, so I will keep silent.

SOCRATES : Clearly, in my present situation I cannot be entirely disinterested : and so I conjure you, Simmias and Cebes, not to think about Socrates, but only about the truth. Agree with me if you judge that I am right. If you catch me falsifying the argument, resist me with might and main. Truth alone ought to be our object. And unless you watch me critically, I may mislead you, in my enthusiasm, and, like the bee, leave my sting in you before I die.

SIMMIAS : We will do our best to be impartial. . . . Shall we start ? And shall I admit that, so far as I can see, only the simplest people believe in immortality ? They believe it because they wish to.

SOCRATES : And yet have you never noticed how vehemently some people, who are not simple, resist the idea, and seem actually to resent it ? There are men, I assure you, who refuse to believe in their own eternity because they do *not* wish to. In my opinion, they are merely afraid of the dark. And men of this type will not even examine the evidence.

SIMMIAS : What evidence ?

SOCRATES : Many hundreds of people declare that they have communicated with the dead.

SIMMIAS : Socrates ! You don't credit those old-wives' tales ?

SOCRATES : Who am I to say that such people

are talking nonsense ? From earliest manhood I have been directed by a spiritual voice. Clever men, who have not heard it, maintain that it is a mere hallucination. I, who *have* heard it, am so easily taken in that I cannot agree with them. . . . However, I am not going to argue upon evidence which you consider to be unsound. I will only add this—that because when a friend has died he seems to disappear altogether, and suddenly to have no more effect upon the world, can we rashly assume that he does not exist somewhere else ? If, instead of dying, he had left Athens for good and had gone to live in Egypt, the result for us would be just the same. . . . Now, for all we can know, the people of the future may invent some way by which a man in Egypt may talk with a man in Athens ; and the people of an even more distant future may discover how the living can speak with the dead. But these, I admit, are dreams. We must attack our problem in a spirit of philosophy.

SIMMIAS : I am ready.

[*The reed-music begins.*

SOCRATES : Do you admit that a man has a body ?

SIMMIAS : Of course.

SOCRATES : And that the heart and the brain are parts of his body ?

SIMMIAS : Yes.

SOCRATES : Do we think by means of the brain ?

SIMMIAS : We do.

SOCRATES : An imbecile is not a good thinker because he has not a good brain ?

SIMMIAS : Agreed.

SOCRATES : Although his body may have just as much life in it as the body of a sane person ?

SIMMIAS : True.

SOCRATES : And if we are stunned, our brains will not work and we can no longer think ?

SIMMIAS : Quite so.

SOCRATES : Although life goes on in the heart and the rest of the body ?

SIMMIAS : It must—or we should never " come round," as they say.

SOCRATES : Then life pertains to the heart and thought to the brain ?

SIMMIAS : Apparently.

SOCRATES : Life and thought, therefore, are not one and the same thing ?

SIMMIAS : Perhaps not.

SOCRATES : So that life might cease without the power of thought ceasing ?

SIMMIAS : I don't agree there. If life ceases, the brain cannot work.

SOCRATES : And do you say that the mind is generated by the brain or that the brain is made active by the presence in it of a mind ?

SIMMIAS : If I hit a man on the head, I injure his brain, and he cannot think. That looks to me as though the mind is something like heat which is caused by the friction of the brain.

SOCRATES : Does that musician out there make music by blowing upon a reed ?

SIMMIAS : Yes.

SOCRATES : And if I broke the reed, he would no longer be a musician ?

SIMMIAS : I cannot say that.

SOCRATES : Would you say, instead, that, although he would still be a musician, he could no longer produce music from that particular reed ?

SIMMIAS : I should say that.

SOCRATES : Then we cannot argue that the mind ceases to exist because its brain has been injured or has entirely ceased to act ?

SIMMIAS : Possibly not.

SOCRATES : We must decide therefore whether the brain manufactures the mind or whether the mind is, as it were, a current of force which, for a certain number of years, which we call a lifetime, is connected with the brain.

SIMMIAS : Yes.

SOCRATES : What do our wisest men teach us about the origin of sight ? Do they declare that eyes first appeared in the world by pure chance or because the creature which developed them desired to see ?

SIMMIAS : The latter.

SOCRATES : And is the brain of a man a better instrument of thought than the brain of a fish ?

SIMMIAS : Undoubtedly.

SOCRATES : What caused that development of the brain ? Must it not have been some desire on the part of the creature which developed it—the desire, in fact, to think better ?

SIMMIAS : Yes.

SOCRATES : So that it was the mind which made for itself a better brain ?

SIMMIAS : It must have been.

SOCRATES : And yet you want me to believe that the brain also created the mind. Come, my dear Simmias, you cannot go in and out of a door at the same moment.

SIMMIAS : No. I begin to suspect that the mind *is*, as you indicate, something that uses the brain.

SOCRATES: Something, therefore, that can retire out of the brain, and lie dormant for a time —as we saw just now in respect of the man whom in fancy you stunned. But so long as life remains in the body and is able to flow back into the brain, the mind—the person himself—can use the stream of life as a means of returning to the brain.

SIMMIAS: I confess that you have shaken my confidence.

SOCRATES: We might think more clearly about the problem if we did not assume that life and the soul are one and the same thing.

SIMMIAS: Yes, I see that now.

[*The reed-music ceases.*

SOCRATES: I have still to tackle our friend Cebes. For some time he has been chafing in his corner and longing to overthrow me.

CEBES: Yes, I have! My point of view is a different one. I cannot believe that the mind or soul can survive death because——

SOCRATES: Because——? I think I can guess what is coming. May I lead the way?

CEBES: Yes, do.

SOCRATES: If there is any part of a man that will not perish, it must be his mind or soul, not his body?

CEBES: Yes.

SOCRATES: The whole of his mind or a part of it?

CEBES: I don't quite understand.

SOCRATES: Just now you were going to say that the mind is developed in response to our need of grappling with the particular conditions of this world.

CEBES: I was, indeed.

SOCRATES : For example, the mind is mostly used in buying and selling, and in what we call mundane matters.

CEBES : Exactly.

SOCRATES : A dentist possesses knowledge of dentistry. He uses his mind in connection with our teeth.

CEBES : Yes.

SOCRATES : So that if he found himself in another world, where nobody had any teeth or any physical organism at all, his knowledge of dentistry would be useless.

CEBES : That is just my point.

SOCRATES : And therefore the mind, in so far as it is occupied with dentistry, is something created by contact with the physical world ?

CEBES : You are not going to say that other men may be immortal, but no dentists ?

SOCRATES : That would be both improbable and ungrateful ! No. I am going to suggest that there is not much of the mind which can possibly be immortal, because for the most part we use our minds upon matters that are peculiar to our present world. The immortal portion of the mind must be very small—like the core of an apple : if indeed it exists.

CEBES : And where do you find it ?

SOCRATES : Just a moment. A clever boy may become either a statesman, a soldier, a poet, or anything else. His general cleverness may express itself in any one of various ways ; and the form which it ultimately takes is due, as a rule, to his circumstances. Do you agree ?

CEBES : I do.

SOCRATES : Well, the soul might be something like that—a general ability, either great or small, which could be applied to the conditions of any

world in which it found itself. You, as a man alive in Athens, direct your thoughts to the problems which life on this earth presents. If you had been born on the moon, you would be pondering a different set of problems.

CEBES : Possibly. But I cannot think of any mental or spiritual attributes which are not created, as it were, by the conditions of earthly life. I do really doubt whether there is any part of the mind which does not derive from the instincts of the body—from the forces of nature that exist alike in us and in animals and insects.

SOCRATES : We agree that the body is a form of nature and is ruled by natural instincts ?

CEBES : Yes.

SOCRATES : Do we agree that the instincts which life puts into a body are there to serve the interests of the body ? For example, to save it from injury ?

CEBES : Yes.

SOCRATES : If, then, we discovered in men something which causes them to over-rule the promptings of natural instinct, we might reasonably suspect that the body is not the origin of its own enemy.

CEBES : Go on, if you please.

SOCRATES : Is it natural to want food ?

CEBES : The strongest of all our instincts.

SOCRATES : Imagine that two men are shipwrecked, and clinging to a raft in the middle of the sea, and are unable to guess how long they may be left there or whether they will ever be rescued : and imagine that only one of them has food, and he only a little—it would be natural for him to keep it all for himself and even to push his companion off the raft ?

CEBES : It would be natural, I suppose, but very disgraceful.

Socrates : Suppose he were to share his food with the other man, risking starvation—he would be acting against nature ?

Cebes : Decidedly.

Socrates : He would be acting supernaturally. Do you admit that a man might behave in this way ?

Cebes : A few might.

Socrates : Might ? A few most certainly would. Why, have you never heard how in battle a man will risk death in the hope of saving a friend ?

Phædo : We all know that men have done that. There is one man in this room who did it. The name of the friend was Alcibiades : the name of the man was Socrates.

Cebes : I admit that sometimes a few men have acted as you describe.

Socrates : And should we be right in saying that they acted so out of love, out of fellow-feeling ?

Cebes : Yes.

Socrates : And not in accordance with the instincts of nature and the body, but quite definitely against them ?

Cebes : Yes.

Socrates : So that love is contrary to the instinct of self-preservation. Could we say that all love is supernatural ? Of course I distinguish between love and lust.

Cebes : You imply that love indicates the presence in a man of something which is not derived from nature ?

Socrates : I cannot explain an act of self-sacrifice except by assuming that we have something within us that scorns and over-rides the selfish promptings of nature. In a word, I am

satisfied that love does not come from the body. . . . Again, will you tell me why we Athenians are not cannibals ?

CEBES : As men become civilised, they become more humane.

SOCRATES : And do all men make some effort, however feeble, to live more humanely than a savage ?

CEBES : Yes.

SOCRATES : And some will even work hard for a future which they will never see ?

CEBES : A few—yes.

SOCRATES : Should we say that they are men of aspiration ?

CEBES : Certainly.

SOCRATES : How can we aspire to become better than we are if there is nothing in us but what nature puts there ? How do you explain the continual aspiration of humanity toward a nobler life ?

CEBES : I'm afraid I cannot.

SOCRATES : And if we cannot find in the instincts of nature any explanation of love, self-sacrifice, aspiration, and self-control, must we not look for the explanation elsewhere ?

CEBES : I suppose we must.

SOCRATES : You have admitted that these attributes exist in man ?

CEBES : Yes.

SOCRATES : And that, far from serving the interests of the body, they often thwart those interests ?

CEBES : Yes.

SOCRATES : Then there is something in man that is superior to nature, something that refuses to

obey the passionate commands of the body. Can we reasonably suppose that the body in any way produced it ?

CEBES : I don't see how we can.

SOCRATES : But, if not, we must assume that it is something distinct from the body, and therefore not subject to the same laws. And is not that precisely what we mean by the " soul " ? And if one of the laws which control the body is the law that it must perish, we have no warrant for supposing that this law applies to the soul.

CEBES (*giving up the argument*) : And yet men will always doubt their own immortality.

SOCRATES : Always—and in each generation they will use different words. I have spoken of the soul and body. The men of the future will invent other terms, and will be very proud of them, and, if they could hear me, would laugh at my simplicity. But new words do not alter a problem. And I think, Cebes, that men will more easily acknowledge the survival of the soul when they have got rid of the supposition that, if any part of a personality is to survive, the whole of it must. . . . No ! Not the whole personality is immortal, but only a little part of it. Indeed, I would say that the immortal soul is a very shy creature. If we go for a walk in the streets and look at the hundreds of faces that pass by, in how many do we see any suggestion that it is the habitation of an eternal being ? Nor do we catch a glimpse of the immortal self in action, as it were, more than a very few times in the course of a long life. We see it whenever a man shows fortitude, overcoming his instinctive fears ; or reveals a disinterested love for another ; or aspires toward a juster and wiser society. If there were nothing supernatural in us we should still be savages, each in his separate cave. The immortal within us does not enter the body, in all its splendour, when the body is kindled into

life. It grows, and grows gradually : and very often it soon stops growing. But it is only the immortal essence in men, mysteriously involving itself in the tangles of time and space, which has forced humanity to push desperately against the grain of instinct and nature. It is always laboriously struggling to make men love and aspire. But the instincts of our mortal nature are exceedingly powerful forces, and the immortal self is engaged on a tremendous task, compared with which the labours of Heracles were child's play.

[*A brief pause.*

Enter the JAILER.

JAILER : I am sorry to interrupt you. Your wife and two of your children are waiting outside.

SOCRATES : Admit them.

JAILER (*apologetically*) : It is customary.

[*Exit.*

CRITO : Would you like us to leave you for a time ?

SOCRATES : No. This interview must be very brief. Poor woman—she could never believe that I am invisible.

CEBES : How—invisible ?

SOCRATES (*mock-reproachful*) : Cebes ! If I cannot persuade *you* that I am an invisible being who, like an actor in a comedy, is merely looking at you from behind the mask of this face, how can I hope to persuade the world in general ? I am invisible, and you to whom I speak are invisible. We do our best to communicate through the clumsy medium of the senses, that is all : and that is why we can only convey the simplest messages and no more than a tenth part of our meaning.

[*Enter the* JAILER, *followed by* XANTIPPE *and her two younger* CHILDREN—*sons.*

JAILER (*to* XANTIPPE) : Keep steady. It is important that he should not be agitated.

[*Exit the* JAILER.

SOCRATES : Xantippe, we must bid each other good-bye, and then go our ways.

XANTIPPE : Oh, that you should have come to this ! That you should die as a malefactor, at the hands of the State ! What will your children think of you ? And I, as your wife—I shall be disgraced.

SOCRATES : Not for ever, I hope.

XANTIPPE : If only you had been sensible ! If only you had not exasperated your judges !

SOCRATES : They were not the first people whom I exasperated. (*Humorously*) You know that.

XANTIPPE : I daresay I ought to have been more patient. And now it's too late. . . . Socrates, my husband—I cannot bear to think of you dying—dying, that man says, when the sun goes down.

SOCRATES : Is it difficult to face an event which every man, since the beginning of the world, has faced ? Come, let us say good-bye, and then —go you home and do your best for our children.

XANTIPPE : What will become of them ? What will become of me ? I can't go on living without you.

SOCRATES : Crito will see that neither you nor the children shall starve.

CRITO : Be sure of that.

XANTIPPE : And never again—never, never again, will you talk with your friends : and to you that has meant everything—I know.

SOCRATES : We must part, Xantippe. Even if I had been sensible, and had admitted that my influence was evil, I could not have lived much longer.

XANTIPPE : But—to be put out of the way by your fellow-citizens ! Have you no shame ? No, no—you never had. You always went about in rags. . . . And *I* have to face the neighbours.

SOCRATES : Children, come here. . . . Look upon courage as the highest of all virtues. Fight against injustice. Be ready to die rather than to do anything which is unworthy of man's position in this world.

XANTIPPE : They don't understand you. . . .

SOCRATES : They will. Xantippe, I grieve that we were not happier.

XANTIPPE (*to* CRITO) : Can't you save him ? What are you all doing here if you can't save him ? Tell him to apologise to the judges !

CRITO : We have done what we could.

XANTIPPE : My children are dishonoured. Everybody will know that their father——

SOCRATES (*rising*) : That is enough ! Xantippe —good-bye. And good-bye, children, to you. . . . Crito, please take them out.

XANTIPPE : Me ? Me, too ?

CRITO : You are troubling him. Come away.

XANTIPPE (*to* CRITO) : I know you never liked me—but you won't desert me ?

CRITO : None of us will desert you. . . . It is really best for you to go.

XANTIPPE (*gathering the* CHILDREN) : My boys ! You will never see him again !

SOCRATES (*steadily*) : Good-bye.

XANTIPPE : What an end, what a shameful end !

[*Exeunt* CRITO, XANTIPPE, *and the* Two CHILDREN.

SOCRATES : How strange that anybody should ever have called me wise. . . . There is a wisdom of the affections ; and the man whose marriage

is a failure ought not to blame his luck, but his lack of instinct. To me most women have been foreigners.

[*The reed-music begins.*

Enter CRITO.

CRITO : She has gone away fairly calm.

SOCRATES : Thank you. . . . How much longer can I hope to be here among you all ?

CRITO : Don't ask. . . .

SOCRATES : Half an hour ?

CRITO : Not quite.

SOCRATES : Time enough for a last interchange of thoughts.

PHÆDO : Socrates. . . .

SOCRATES : Well ?

PHÆDO : What do you believe happens to a soul after death, and what do you think the world of the dead is like ?

SOCRATES : My dear friend, Phædo ! Could a child in the womb imagine correctly the hills and the seas and the cities of our world ? And how should I be able to foretell what will happen to the soul when death, like a midwife, has delivered it from the heart and brain ?

CEBES : You have no certainty at all ?

SOCRATES : Certainty—no. . . . But stay ! If you like, I will try to amuse you by repeating something which was told me—long ago—by one who must be nameless.

PHÆDO : Please do !

SOCRATES : You may laugh at my story, if you are so inclined.

PHÆDO : We shall not laugh.

SOCRATES : Very well then. . . . My instructor said to me, " Do not be astonished, Socrates,

when I tell you that the world of souls is very much like the world which you now inhabit. Only a shallow mind will suppose that they must be entirely different. They are alike for the very good reason that one is the original and the other a copy. The physical world," he said, " is merely a solidification of the spiritual world : or you might say that they are like two statues that have been cast in the same mould, but the one cast in gold and the other in bronze. . . .

" In the upper world, therefore, you will find trees and flowers and fruits, of which our own are just crude imitations : and great rivers that are more like flowing colour than flowing water, and hills that contain gems which are smoother and more transparent and more splendid than the emeralds and sardonyxes and jaspers which we prize so much. And in that world there are birds and animals, too, and men. They exist on the fringe of our physical atmosphere somewhat as we ourselves, being land-creatures, build our cities on the border of the sea. The climate there is so dulcet that they are immune from all disease, and live much longer than we do, and are equipped with senses of far greater subtlety. They have temples, and sacred places in which the gods really dwell, and they hear the voices of the gods and are able to converse with them : and they see the sun, the moon, and the stars as they veritably are." . . .

And then he told me that every man is attended, throughout his life, by a guardian spirit which is, perhaps, the great and beautiful being whom he is destined in the end to become, and who is all the while latent within him, as the oak lies latent in the acorn. After death this guardian leads the soul from the physical realm to the spiritual. The wise and well-ordered soul follows her guardian in a dreamy condition and very soon reaches her destination ; but a soul

which hankers after the body flutters for a long while about the lifeless frame from which it has been expelled, and is only conveyed by violence and against her will into the upper world. . . . And when the dead have arrived there, first of all they have sentence passed upon them. Those who, during life, have dominated the instincts of the body dwell in places of beauty which time would fail me to tell of. Those who were neither good nor evil are taken to one of the great rivers, and there they are left to purge themselves of whatever was ugly in their natures. And those who have been incurably violent or vicious or unjust then experience the torment of perpetual isolation ; for after death the soul can no longer disguise her true appearance, and these souls are so hideous to behold that no one will be their companion or guide, but everyone flees away from them and they are left to wander for ever alone. . . . " Such," he said, " is the nature of the other world and the experience of the soul immediately after death : and when she has cleansed herself of all the sorrow and pain which she caused on earth, another guardian brings her back again after many revolutions of ages."

[*The reed-music ceases.*

Nobody who has any common sense will say that these descriptions are literal and exact, but I believe we may think that something of the kind is true. And that is why a man, if he has tried to be temperate, just, courageous, and intellectually honest, should be of good cheer concerning the future of his soul, for if she is arrayed in these qualities she is ready to set forth without fear upon her journey to the other world, when her hour comes. . . . You, Simmias and Cebes—and all other men—will start at one time or another on that journey. (*Humorously*) " Me already," as a tragic poet would say, " the voice of fate calls."

[*Enter the* JAILER.

Is it time ?

JAILER : I have prepared the draught. . . .

SOCRATES : And I am ready.

JAILER : So be it.

[*Exit the* JAILER.

CRITO : Not yet, Socrates ! We beg you to put off the end till the very last moment.

SIMMIAS : We do—all of us !

CEBES : There must be at least ten minutes to run. . . .

SOCRATES : Keep calm, please. I should only think myself ridiculous if I spun out any further a life that is already forfeit. Let the man bring it.

CRITO : Is there any way in which we can serve you ? Have you any commands for us ?

SOCRATES : Nothing particular.

[*A short pause.*

CRITO : In what way shall we bury you ?

SOCRATES : Bury me ? Me, Crito ? . . . First of all, you must be sure to get hold of me, and take very great care that I do not escape you. (*Turning to the others*) I cannot make my old friend believe that when I have drunk the poison I shall still be the Socrates who has been talking with you about the soul, and not that mask of Socrates which he will soon be gazing at—a mere dead body. I want you all to go surety for me, just as at the trial he himself went surety for me to the judges. With this difference—that *he* undertook that I should remain, but you must go surety that I shall *not* remain, but shall go far away.

PHÆDO : *I* will do that.

SOCRATES : So be of good heart, my dear Crito, when the time comes, and say that you are burying my body only : and do with *that* whatever is usual and whatever you think best.

[*Enter the* JAILER, *bringing the goblet of hemlock.*

SIMMIAS : Oh, oh !

CEBES : What shall we do ?

JAILER : Socrates, I know that you are the gentlest and noblest and best of all men who ever came to this place. I am quite sure that you will not rage at me, as many do when I obey my orders. You realise that others, and not I, have decreed this. And so I will wish you farewell. Socrates—farewell—and try to bear lightly what cannot be shunned.

SOCRATES : My friend, I return your good wishes, and will do as you bid. I thank you for your kindness.

CRITO (*wringing his hands*) : Men, men, oh, men !

CEBES : Socrates !

SIMMIAS : It can't be, it can't !

SOCRATES (*almost sternly*) : What is the meaning of this outcry ? I have heard that a man should die in peace. Be quiet, I beg you, and bear all with fortitude. . . . (*Turning to the* JAILER) You, my good friend, are experienced in this matter. Tell me how I am to proceed.

JAILER : You have only to walk about, for perhaps a minute, until your legs are heavy. Then lie down, and the poison will work. It is very swift.

SOCRATES : Give it me.

[SOCRATES *takes the goblet.*

SOCRATES : What is the rule about making a libation to one of the gods ? May I, or not ?

JAILER : We only prepare so much as we think will be necessary.

SOCRATES : I understand. . . . But at least I may ask the gods to prosper my journey from this world to the next. And so I now pray.

[*As he prepares to drink the poison, the others cover their faces with their cloaks.* CRITO, SIMMIAS, *and* CEBES *do so with horror and cannot quite restrain their grief.* PHÆDO *is the last to cover his face, and he does so with a slow and dignified movement.* SOCRATES *drains the goblet. He then proceeds to walk up and down the prison. The* JAILER, *standing by the door, fulfils his duty by uncovering his face and watching the prisoner.*

SOCRATES : Never to walk in the streets of Athens again, never to wake up and see the familiar sky, never to consort any more with the friends whom I have loved so much . . . it is strange to know that. . . . Athens will pass away, as Troy passed, and become a vague memory in the busy minds of the men to be. I pray that the men of the future may live life more nobly than we live it ! I pray that injustice and greed and all littleness of soul may perish from the nature of man. . . .

[*A short pause.*

JAILER : I think you had better lie down.

SOCRATES : You are right. My legs are becoming heavy.

[SOCRATES *lies down on the pallet. The* JAILER *goes up to him and presses his foot.*

JAILER : Can you feel that ?

SOCRATES : No. . . . I will cover my face while I still have strength to do so.

[*He draws a sheet over his face. The* JAILER *presses his thigh.*

JAILER : You feel nothing now ?

SOCRATES : My body already seems like a fallen tree, or a rock by the wayside.

JAILER : It is well.

SOCRATES : When the poison reaches the heart, that will be the end. . . . It is coming near now.

JAILER : It is.

[SOCRATES *uncovers his face.*

SOCRATES : Crito . . . I owe a cock to Asclepios. Remember to pay the debt.

CRITO : I will. . . .

[SOCRATES *covers his face again. A pause.*

CRITO : Is there anything else ?

[*Silence. The reed-music begins.*

The JAILER *uncovers* SOCRATES' *face. He beckons to* CRITO.

CRITO *goes to the body, looks at the face, and bows his head.*

PHÆDO *has watched him, and now stands up, gazing at the body.*

PHÆDO : He is gone—like a ship to the sea.

[*The reed-music continues.*

THE END

ALISON'S HOUSE

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ALISON'S HOUSE

A Play in Three Acts

by

SUSAN GLASPELL

CHARACTERS

(In order of appearance)

ANN LESLIE	Mr. Stanhope's secretary
JENNIE	An old servant
RICHARD KNOWLES	A reporter
TED STANHOPE	The younger son
LOUISE	Eben Stanhope's wife
THE FATHER	John Stanhope, a man of sixty-three
MISS AGATHA	Stanhope's sister, about sixty-five
EBEN	Stanhope's older son, a little over thirty
ELSA	Stanhope's daughter, younger than Eben
HODGES	
MRS. HODGES	

ACT I

SCENE : *The library of the old Stanhope homestead in Iowa, on the Mississippi, where* MISS AGATHA STANHOPE *still lives. There is a river village near by, and the small city where the other* STANHOPES *now live is about ten miles up the river.*

It is the room of people who have lived in comfortable circumstances, and signifies a family of traditions and cultivation.

Left, just rear of centre, a door into the hall. In the rear corner, left, a stone fireplace. In the rear wall, a bay window, the windows coming down to a low seat, and curtained with old plum-coloured velvet. Right of this are books, which are continued into an alcove. There is an easy chair near the bay window, by it a footstool and a low table ; front, right, a long table. At the left, front of door, a desk. The room is carpeted, a tone deeper than the curtains. On the walls are portraits of an older generation.

The time is eleven in the morning of the last day of the nineteenth century, December 31, 1899. But the furnishings of the library are of a period earlier than this.

As the curtain rises, ANN *is seated before her Oliver typewriter, near the alcove, behind the long table. She is fair, sensitive looking. She wears a shirt-waist and blue skirt, in the manner of 1899. She is about twenty-three, and has gentle manners. She reaches down and takes another old paper from a small horsehair trunk beside her. Makes a typewritten note.*

[*Enter* JENNIE.

JENNIE (*speaking to some one behind her*) : You had better come in here. Everything is so upset, with the moving. Oh, here is Miss Ann.—He says he's a reporter, miss. I don't know anything about it.

[*Enter* KNOWLES, *a young man.* JENNIE *goes out.*

ANN : You wished to see Mr. Stanhope ?

KNOWLES : Well—yes, some of the family. But most of all, the house.

ANN : The house is being broken up.

KNOWLES : I want to see it before it's broken up. Especially the room that was used by Miss Alison Stanhope.

ANN : I think no one goes in that room, except the family.

KNOWLES : You are not—of the family ?

ANN : Oh, no. I am Mr. Stanhope's secretary.

KNOWLES (*going a little nearer*) : Those papers you're working with—are they by any chance the papers of Miss Alison Stanhope ?

ANN : They are not.

KNOWLES (*with his very nice smile*) : And it's none of my business what they are. I'm from the *Chicago Record Herald*. Down to get a little story about the house, because it is being broken up.

ANN (*with a smile*) : Isn't there anything going on in Chicago ?

KNOWLES : Occasionally some one crosses the street.

ANN : I'm surprised a metropolitan paper should be interested in the fact Miss Agatha Stanhope is moving up to town to live with her brother.

KNOWLES : It isn't Miss Agatha. It's Miss Alison.

ANN : But aren't you a little late ? Miss Alison has been dead eighteen years.

KNOWLES : She isn't dead. Anything about her is live. She belongs to the world. But the family doesn't seem to know that.

ANN : They published her poems.

KNOWLES : But anything about where—how—they were written. The desk she sat at. The window she looked from. Is there a bird singing in

that tree now? Well, no, probably not, the last day of December. But looking through the dead branches, to meadows sloping to the Mississippi, as she looked.

ANN : You cared for the poems.

KNOWLES : I'll never forget the day I got them, at the bookshop on the Midway, and walked down through Jackson Park, and saw the lake—because she had seen the river. I write a little poetry myself.

ANN : I wish I could. But I can't write it. That's why I'm so grateful to Alison.

KNOWLES : I know. Do you read the *Record Herald?*

ANN : Usually.

KNOWLES : Did you see it last Wednesday?

ANN : I don't remember.

KNOWLES : Do you remember a poem—no, verses—" Michigan Avenue "?

ANN : I'm afraid I didn't see that.

KNOWLES (*grinning*) : Well, I did.

ANN : You get your poems printed?

KNOWLES : I'm no Alison, but——

ANN : I suppose you haven't it with you?

KNOWLES : Well, since you mention it, I don't seem to remember taking it out of my vest pocket.

ANN : I'd love to see it.

KNOWLES : You would? Oh, well, I don't mind. (*Taking a clipping from his pocket, he hands it to her.*) Don't *expect* anything.

ANN (*who is reading*) : Oh, I think that's nice.

KNOWLES (*eagerly looking over her shoulder*) : Which part?

ANN : The barges that loiter by the avenue.

KNOWLES : Just a fancy. I like best, " And lights in fog, like——"

[TED *comes in whistling* " *A hot time in the old town to-night.*"

ANN : Ted ! Here is a poem about—— (*To* KNOWLES) Oh, here is a member of the family, Mr. Edward Stanhope. This gentleman——

KNOWLES : Knowles.

ANN : Mr. Knowles is a reporter. He's from the *Record Herald.*

TED : Honest ?

KNOWLES (*laughing*) : I swear to it.

ANN : He wants to see the house.

TED : Should have come sooner. Everything's topsy-turvy. Anyway—why ?

KNOWLES : Because Alison Stanhope lived and died here.

TED : I see. Well, they haven't started on Alison's room yet. Aunt Agatha won't let them.

KNOWLES : Won't you let me see it ? It isn't just the story. It's—a feeling about it. (*To* ANN) You know. And since it's going to be broken up, and won't be any more, why not someone who has a feeling about it to—to hold it in memory, you might say.

TED (*uncertainly*) : Well, I dunno.

ANN : I've been in there. Mr. Stanhope took me when I came down this morning. He said he wanted me to be there, before it ceased. It's just the same. It's as if she might come in the door.

KNOWLES : We understand. We three. Why trouble the older folks about it ? This is the last day of the nineteenth century.

TED : Well, there's no lie, but——

KNOWLES : I can't tell you how I'd appreciate it. How much it would mean to me.

TED (*at the door, looking into the hall*) : They're all in the dining-room, counting dishes.

KNOWLES : Fine !

TED : But if Louise finds out.

KNOWLES : She won't. We'll see to it.

TED (*attracted by the idea of stealing a march*) : S—h.

[*His hand over his mouth, goes out, softly, followed by* KNOWLES. ANN *returns to the poem she had not finished.*

Enter LOUISE.

LOUISE (*sharply*) : What is this story of Jennie's about a reporter ?

ANN : There was a reporter.

LOUISE : Did you talk to him ?

ANN : Not much.

LOUISE : Where is he ?

ANN : He went out just now.

LOUISE : Where ?

ANN : Why, just out.

LOUISE : You refuse to talk to me—about a family matter ?

ANN (*examining a paper from the trunk*) : There is so much for me to do.

LOUISE : Well, really. We'll see about this ! (*Goes to the door.*) Father ! Father Stanhope !

ANN : Oh, please ! Surely that isn't necessary, when he's so busy—troubled.

LOUISE : So am I busy—troubled.—Yes, father. Just a moment, please.

[*Enter* STANHOPE. *He has the look of a man who has made a place for himself, who is acquainted with*

responsibilities. He is vigorous for a man of sixty-three, though troubled at the moment. One soon feels he has a feeling for others that makes him tolerant, though firm.

STANHOPE (*good humouredly*): What's the trouble now?

LOUISE: Father, I think you ought to know there's a reporter in the house. Ann knows about it, and won't tell.

STANHOPE: Yes? Well, when you've seen as many reporters as I have you'll know they don't usually shoot, or even bite. He probably came down about the Mahoney case.

LOUISE (*to* ANN): Where was he from?

ANN: Chicago.

LOUISE: Chicago! You see? "The Mahoney case"!

STANHOPE: What did he want, Ann?

ANN: To see the house.

LOUISE: Why? Why should he see the house?

ANN: Because Alison lived here.

LOUISE: I knew that!

STANHOPE: Well, and what of it? My dear, you can't have a distinguished person in the family without running into a little public interest.

[*He takes one of the papers from the trunk.*

LOUISE: Father! Please let's try to do this without—stirring things up. Just because we're breaking up the house do we have to revive the stories about Alison?

STANHOPE: To what stories about my sister do you refer?

LOUISE: Now please don't be vexed with me. You know as well as I do; the whole story they've harped on so long, that she was different,

a rebel—goodness, I don't know what they do mean.

STANHOPE : I think the worst they can say about my dear sister is that she was a great soul, and a poet. It isn't going to hurt my feelings to have it said again.

LOUISE : But you know how they talk. It makes the whole family seem—different. And after Elsa—— (*At this, change.*) Oh, forgive me, but you must know how the town does talk about Elsa. You can't run away with a married man, live with a man who has a wife and children, and not be talked about.

ANN : In making the memoranda of these old contracts, I am to——

[STANHOPE *moves to her.*

LOUISE : And they do link it up with something queer about Alison.

STANHOPE (*checking anger, and speaking easily*) : That would be most unjust to Alison. She never lived with a man who had a wife and children.

LOUISE (*knowing she shouldn't say it*) : She wanted to, didn't she ?

STANHOPE (*again checking anger, speaking humorously*) : Oh, we want to do lots of things we don't do. I might want to ask my daughter-in-law to keep still. In fact, I think I shall.

LOUISE (*rather angry, and made the more persistent by it*) : Where did he go, this reporter ?

ANN : Why they went out, just a moment ago.

LOUISE : They ? Who's with him ?

ANN : He's with Ted.

LOUISE : Ted ! He's already told him enough to fill a page ! Where did they go ?

STANHOPE (*as* ANN *peers at a paper*) : Well, where did they go, Ann—the roof—the cellar ?

ANN : He wanted to see the Alison room.

LOUISE : And you dared—and Ted dared—— Oh, what *management.*

[*She moves to the door, but* STANHOPE *follows.*

STANHOPE : No. Not up there. No disturbance in Alison's room. It is to keep its—serenity, the one day it has left.

LOUISE : Serenity ! With reporters prowling around ?

ANN : He writes poetry himself.

LOUISE : How absurd !

ANN : No, it was quite good.

LOUISE : The trouble is, father, the family has too many on the outskirts, who like to snatch a little of the sensationalism. I'm amazed you can't see my point. Just now, after Elsa——

STANHOPE : I have told you before I did not wish to discuss my daughter with you.

LOUISE : But you act as if I had nothing to do with it. Your daughter is my husband's sister—I'm sorry to say. My children are Stanhopes. I don't want them taunted.

STANHOPE : Have they been taunted ? They're rather young for that.

LOUISE : They will be.

STANHOPE : Well, sufficient unto the day is the taunting thereof.

LOUISE : But if we stir it all up again——

STANHOPE : The family china and silver seem more important at the moment than the family disgraces. I hadn't thought you need come down here, Louise ; but you were anxious to get your Aunt Agatha moved with the least friction. Now, why not a little management in the dining-room ? Poor Agatha's all upset.

LOUISE (*starting to go, but turning*) : It isn't good for Eben, either !

STANHOPE (*occupied with a paper*) : The dining-room ?

LOUISE : Oh, father, why won't you be serious with me ?

STANHOPE : Because you make me feel too serious, perhaps.

LOUISE : Eben isn't any too well grounded.

STANHOPE : Oh, Eben has a very good hold on the law.

LOUISE : I mean the law of *life*.

STANHOPE : Oh ! Law of life.

LOUISE : He has that same thing. He could just —shake everything loose. I'm sorry to talk before outsiders.

STANHOPE : I don't regard Ann as an outsider. It was you came where she was working, not Ann who intruded. Now, Ann, take these notes, please.

LOUISE : I think a family should stand together.

STANHOPE : That's right. Stand by your Aunt Agatha.

LOUISE (*murmuring as she goes out*) : What can I *do* ?

STANHOPE (*sitting down by* ANN, *she with her pad for dictation*) : Sometimes I wish I weren't the head of a family. Sometimes I wish there weren't any family.

[ANN *had begun to take this ; she tears off the page.*

Quite so. Some things we never put down. Even Alison didn't put it all down. (*Listening to footsteps in the hall*) Ted ?

[TED *comes to the door.*

Come in here. Both of you.

[KNOWLES *follows* TED *into the room.*

TED : This is Mr. Knowles, father.

STANHOPE (*curtly*) : How do you do ?

KNOWLES : How do you do, sir ?

STANHOPE (*to* TED) : What have you been doing ?

TED : Just walking around.

STANHOPE : Where ?

TED : Round the house.

STANHOPE : What room of the house ?

KNOWLES : My fault, sir. I wanted to see Miss Alison's room.

STANHOPE : You did, did you ? A great many people have wanted to see it, and haven't.

KNOWLES (*to* TED) : I want to thank you for letting me see it.

STANHOPE : He had no business to let you see it !

KNOWLES : Nevertheless, I shall remember it always.

STANHOPE (*momentarily touched by the sincerity of his tone*) : And now you're going to write a lurid story about it.

KNOWLES : Not lurid. (*With a smile*) That wouldn't be the way to handle this story. But that room belongs to the world, don't you think so ? Alison Stanhope's room—holds something.

[AGATHA STANHOPE *has appeared in the doorway ; she retains the manner of strength, though obviously feeble. She is carrying a china teapot, and a sugar-bowl. She is arrested by* KNOWLES' *last words.*

AGATHA : What does it hold ? (*Fearful of dropping the teapot, she holds it against her.*) What does it hold ?

STANHOPE : Never mind, Agatha.

[*He tries to take the pieces she carries, but she does not give them to him.*

AGATHA : What is he here for ?

STANHOPE : It's all right, Agatha.

[*He guides her to the big chair, would help her seat herself.*

AGATHA : What does he know about it ?

STANHOPE : Nothing. Nothing at all.

[*Enter* JENNIE, *carrying a box filled with straw, on the top of which is another piece of the tea-set.*

JENNIE : I think this will be all right, Miss Agatha.

[*She puts it down, goes out.*

AGATHA *still looks at the reporter. With* STANHOPE'S *help she is seated, as if not knowing it has happened.*

STANHOPE (*pulling up a table for the tea-things*) : You needn't do these things yourself.

AGATHA : What does it hold ? It holds nothing, I tell you—nothing. (*Making as if to rise*) Did you take something ?

KNOWLES : Oh, no. Indeed I did not.

AGATHA (*to* STANHOPE) : He's looking for something.

STANHOPE : No, Agatha. Just someone here with Ted. (*Low, to* TED) You haven't done so well, you see.

AGATHA : I won't have people looking through Alison's room. I've guarded it for eighteen years. (*Changing, cunning*) All right, look. Look again. See what you find.

STANHOPE : We'll say good day now, young man.

KNOWLES : One question, please. Sorry. I was told to ask it. Have all the poems of Alison Stanhope been published ?

AGATHA (*who had begun to put the sugar-bowl in the straw*) : What's that ? What does he mean ?

STANHOPE (*soothing her*) : Never mind.—I will answer your question, though. I've answered it many times before. All the poems of Alison Stanhope have been published.

AGATHA : Now. You see? He answered you, didn't he?

KNOWLES : In going through the house, going through old papers—did you——

STANHOPE : It was one question you were to ask.

KNOWLES : Please, just this. It is a matter of public concern, you know. Did you find any papers?

AGATHA : What papers? What papers is he talking about?

STANHOPE : My sister is not equal to this. No, we found nothing that brings any new light to bear on the life of Alison Stanhope. Everything had been gone through long before.

AGATHA : Everything had been gone through long before.

KNOWLES : Thank you, sir. (*To* AGATHA) Sorry to have disturbed you.

AGATHA (*sharply*) : You didn't disturb me.

KNOWLES (*to* ANN, *with a smile*) : Good-bye.

ANN : Good-bye.

[KNOWLES *goes out, followed by* TED.

AGATHA : Where's he from? What does he want?

STANHOPE : It's nothing—nothing at all. (*To himself*) We're lucky to get off this easy.

AGATHA : That's why I didn't want to move. Stirring it all up! I wish they'd let Alison alone.

STANHOPE : They will, dear, in time.

AGATHA : Why can't they let her rest in peace?

STANHOPE : They will, soon. Though it wasn't in peace Alison rested.

AGATHA : What do you mean? I knew her better than you did.

STANHOPE : No, you didn't, Agatha. But never mind. Now, you don't have to pack these things yourself.

AGATHA : Mother's tea-set? I'll pack it myself, and take it with me myself.

ANN : Perhaps I could help you, Miss Agatha. (*To* STANHOPE) Have I time?

STANHOPE (*nodding*) : We don't make much headway, anywhere. (*He sits at the table, discouraged.*) It's harder than I thought.

AGATHA : I wouldn't have believed it, John. I just wouldn't have believed that you—our brother John—should break up the old place, turning me out of home.

STANHOPE : That's because I want to turn you into my own home. You have to take care of me now, Agatha.

AGATHA : Elsa went away and left you.

STANHOPE (*hurt, but again speaking brightly*) : So you have to step into the breach, as usual.

AGATHA : I looked after Alison—so long. Then looked after what Alison left. Now you're turning her out of home.

STANHOPE : Don't say that. She wouldn't say it. Alison was at home in the universe.

AGATHA : Elsa shouldn't have gone away and left her father.

STANHOPE : No.

AGATHA : Alison wouldn't have.

STANHOPE : No, Alison didn't do it—that way. But we differ. We're all different.

AGATHA : Alison stayed.

STANHOPE : Yes. But perhaps she had more to stay with.

AGATHA : You mean me ?

STANHOPE : You, and—all of it.

[ANN *has been packing the tea-set.*

AGATHA (*looking down at it*) : No, no, those are too near together.

ANN (*taking one out*) : Then I'll fix it, this way.

[TED *returns.*

TED : Nice fellow.

STANHOPE (*who at the table is looking through papers*) : You exceeded your authority, young man.

TED : We can't keep Alison in a prison.

AGATHA : Who kept Alison in a prison ? What do you mean—a prison ? She was where she wanted to be, wasn't she ?

TED : She doesn't belong to just us. She belongs to the world.

STANHOPE : Oh, come, Ted. We've heard that times enough, and acted on it.

AGATHA : I say she does not belong to the world ! I say she belongs to us. And I'll keep her from the world, I'll keep the world from getting her —if it kills me, and kills you all !

TED (*at first standing there, astonished by the outburst*) : Well, I hope it doesn't.

[*Sits at the desk, taking paper and pen.*

STANHOPE (*going over to* TED) : Now that is enough. One more word to agitate her, and you'll answer to me. (*Low*) I told you what the doctor said. (*As* ANN *rises, after packing the tea-set*) Well, that's in good shape, isn't it, Agatha ? Now you finish up here, Ann, and Ted will help you list the books.

TED : Soon's I finish this letter. He won't give me the grade unless I tell him.

AGATHA : Who are you writing to ?

TED : My English prof.

AGATHA : What about ?

TED : Alison.

STANHOPE : Keep quiet or leave the room !

TED : Gee, father, there's no other room to go to. They're all torn up.

AGATHA : What's he telling him ?

STANHOPE : Nothing. He's just acting important. Now, Agatha, Michael is here with the carriage. There's no reason for your sitting in this confusion. I'm going to have him drive you to the village for the noon train. That will get you to town in twenty minutes. Louise can go with you ; or Ann, if you prefer. There you'll be comfortable, and can rest.

AGATHA : Me leave this house, while it is still this house ? I shall be the last to step from the door.

STANHOPE : Oh, Agatha. You make it so hard for yourself, and for us all.

AGATHA : Leave things for everyone else to pry into—looking—prying.

TED : What kind of a pen did Alison use, and where is the pen ?

STANHOPE : Be still !

TED : Well, gee, she's my aunt, isn't she ; and you want me to be flunked in English ?

STANHOPE : Go somewhere else !

TED : Where ?

STANHOPE : To the woods—into the river !

AGATHA (*low, gloatingly*) : He doesn't know what kind of a pen she used—and I won't tell.

STANHOPE : No ; why should you ?

[*He goes over to the books. Is looking at titles.*

For a moment AGATHA *watches* TED. *She gets an idea, shrinks from it ; it is terrible to her, but it grows ; she faces it, and for a time she's aware of nothing else, does not move.*

STANHOPE (*as* ANN *puts aside papers*) : You are through there now ?

ANN : I think so.

STANHOPE : Suppose we start on the books. We don't have to do it very minutely, but must have something of a catalogue, as they go to different people.

[ANN *gets ready for this.* STANHOPE *glances at his sister ; but she is a little bent now, turned from him, and he does not see her eyes, burning with terrible purpose.*

(*Low*) Poetry. The Mermaid series, twelve volumes.

[TED *tears off his sheet of paper, crumples it, kicks the leg of the desk, rubs his head.*

TED (*muttering*) : What's anybody *go* to college for ? Gee ! (*Takes another sheet, considers.*) Gee, whiz !

STANHOPE : Chaucer. (*Taking one out*) These are old. (*Reads a little.*) Alison read it aloud, beautifully. Her voice—— (*Stands as if listening. Abruptly breaking from this*) Two volumes.

[*Puts the book back.*

AGATHA *begins to unpack the tea-set. Looks around to see that her brother is not looking. Works carefully, to make no noise. Puts the pieces at the side of her chair, where the others will not see. Presses the straw back in the box.*

Spenser. *The Faerie Queene.* (*Waits for her to write.*) Greene, Marlowe, Jonson.

ANN : All one volume ?

STANHOPE : Yes.

TED : Oh—*rats.*

[*Rubs his head.*

STANHOPE : Shakespeare, five volumes. (*Takes out the next book, examines it.*) This is a nice old edition of Milton. See ? (*Showing it to* ANN) Alison was fond of this book.

ANN : Funny old pictures, aren't they ?

[AGATHA *gets her hands under the box, which is on the low table. With difficulty rises, and takes it from the room.*

STANHOPE : But we must get on with it. Now we come to Robert Burns—good Bobbie.

ANN : One volume ?

STANHOPE : Yes. And Browning—Robert, four volumes ; Mrs. Browning——

[*Enter* LOUISE.

LOUISE : This is the table to be sent to Cousin Marion, isn't it ? (*her hand on the low table from which* AGATHA *has taken the box*).

STANHOPE : Do we need to tear up this room just now ?

LOUISE : The man is here ; and if we are to finish by day after to-morrow.

TED : Did Alison sleep well ?

STANHOPE : Really, Ted, sometimes I think you haven't good sense.

TED : I've got sense enough to know how I can make this grade. You ought to hear *him.* He takes me out for dinner, fills me up on wine——

LOUISE Who ?

TED : Styles—English prof.

LOUISE : Your teachers at Harvard take you out and give you wine ?

TED : Only Styles. Ever since he heard I was her

nephew. Nearly dropped dead first time he asked me. But it always ends telling me I've got no soul—insensitive family—unworthy. He's crazy. Got to get this grade though.

LOUISE : Father, you surely won't permit Ted to write a stranger—telling things—stirring it all up.

STANHOPE Take the table out for Louise, Ted.

LOUISE : What is the tea-set doing on the floor ? Not a very safe place for valuable old dishes.

[*She picks up the teapot and puts it on the big table ; is getting the others.*

STANHOPE (*to* ANN) : Why, I thought you packed that tea-set.

ANN : I did.

STANHOPE : And she unpacked it ?

LOUISE : And left it on the floor.

ANN : But she was so anxious about it.

STANHOPE : I'm afraid. Afraid for Agatha.

TED : Now about what Alison ate.

LOUISE : Seems to me it's Ted whose mind is failing.

STANHOPE : We're not in the mood for this nonsense.

TED : It's no nonsense to me, after flunking history. What did she eat, father ? Did she like sweets ?

LOUISE : Ted might as well be in town.

TED : Meat ? How about meat ?

STANHOPE (*going back to the books*) : No one is paying any attention to you. (*Firmly.*) Tennyson.

TED : Then how am I to get through college ?

LOUISE (*who is dusting the small table*) : I always

said Ted should be sent to a western school. At least, the professors don't intoxicate the students.

TED : Oh, he never got me full but once. Then he was trying to find out about her love-affair.

STANHOPE (*angrily*) : Shelley. Four volumes.

LOUISE : You see ? All this prying. Why it's as if the family weren't anything *else*. Why not tell him your grandfather was governor of the State and that your uncle is in Congress ?

TED : He says the rest of the family is only of interest because it's so vacuous. Vacuous, is that the word ? But about the food, father. I got to get this letter off before he reads what I handed in. Meat. Sweets. Fruit. (*Writes*) Lots of fruit.

STANHOPE : And Keats.

[*He stands looking through the Keats. A door closes outside.*

EBEN (*off*) : How are you, Jennie ?

STANHOPE : Why, that's Eben.

EBEN (*off*) : Oh, but you'll like it in town. Lots more going on. You can go to church.

JENNIE (*off, in a dismal voice*) : I'm out of the habit.

[EBEN *enters. He is self-assured in manner, though somehow one feels the inner uncertainties, hesitations, and the inner beauty.*

EBEN : How are you, father ? Working hard, Louise ?

LOUISE : Certainly.

EBEN : Hello, Ann. (*To* TED, *who stares moodily.*) Well, I see you're energetically on the job.

TED (*solemnly*) : I am doing my best.

EBEN : Who could do more ?

TED (*gloomily*) : Who ?

LOUISE : I thought you weren't coming down till the office closed.

EBEN : I closed it. Nobody wants to do anything. Last day of the year ; last day of the century. Nobody's busy but Cousin Marion. She telephoned three times. Thinks her club women might take the house for a museum.

STANHOPE : She's thought that for two years. They haven't the money.

EBEN : She says they could get a little, and pay gradually. Give a *kermis* or something.

STANHOPE : We'll close with Hodges, who doesn't have to give a *kermis*.

EBEN : Her idea would hold the place together.

STANHOPE : Hold it together for the public. Agatha would never submit to it.

EBEN : How is she ?

STANHOPE : Not well. Over excited, which is just what the doctor warned against. I want to tell you, all of you—are you listening, Ted ?—nothing must be said to agitate her. Everything possible must be kept from her. Dr. Lange told me last night her heart is more and more uncertain. And she's getting—well, queer. Ann packed that tea-set, and soon as we turned our backs she unpacked it.

LOUISE (*who is looking through articles in a small cabinet, left, rear*) : Oh, I hope she doesn't get too queer. We've had enough. I hate the idea of people thinking we're different.

EBEN : Nothing very funny about an old lady, who's lived alone too long, getting a bit childish. She'll be all right, once she's up at father's.

STANHOPE : It's important to keep telling her she must do it for me. Don't let her think we feel she isn't able to live down here alone. Tell her I'm alone.

EBEN (*sympathetically*) : Yes. (*Looking around*) Hate like the dickens to see the place go, father.

STANHOPE : Do you think I don't ?

EBEN : The fun we used to have down here as kids, Elsa and I. Especially when Alison was here. Remember how she was always making us presents ?

STANHOPE : I remember.

EBEN : An apple ; pebbles from the river ; dried grasses she'd made into funny shapes ; little cakes she'd baked. And always her jolly little verses with them. " Alison won't tell," she'd say, when Elsa and I had run off to the river. " Alison knows," she'd say.

TED (*repeating softly as he writes*) : Alison knows.

EBEN : It was all so darn real to-day, coming down here for the last time. And the century going—her century. When I got the first glimpse of the place through the trees, I had a feeling of the whole century being piled on top of her ; that she couldn't get out from under.

LOUISE : How *morbid.* Don't *let* your mind run on such things !

EBEN : Who am I, to tell my mind where to run ? You know, father, I'd like to hear her say once more—right now—here—" Alison understands," because—I'll be darned if I do.

TED : Was Alison a virgin ?

LOUISE : *Father !*

STANHOPE : See here now !

EBEN : Getting fresh, aren't you ?

TED : It isn't me. Why won't you understand ? *He* wants to *know* ; and I got to make this grade.

STANHOPE : There is such a thing as taste, young man.

TED : Just what I told him—women of one's

family—and he almost slapped me. Well, was she a virgin ?

STANHOPE (*violently*) : Yes !

TED : Oh, gee, I hoped she wasn't. (*Starting to write, turning.*) How do you know ?

STANHOPE : Leave the room !

TED : Well, where'll I go ? I don't see how you can be sure.

EBEN (*going to him, taking him by the collar, lifting him to his feet, and shaking him back and forth*) : You miserable little fool ! And you're the baby Alison used to say got through from heaven. The hell you did ! Didn't you get *anything* from her ? (*Shaking him*) Didn't you ?

TED : Say ! Leave me alone, will you ? I guess I was only two years old when she died ! What do I know about her ?

EBEN : Nothing. Absolutely nothing, and never will. Why, that prof. ought to kill you. If your soul hadn't been a shrivelled peanut, something from her would have made you a human being !

STANHOPE : Come now, Eben. That's enough.

EBEN : What's the use of having had an Alison in the family ? Sometimes I think I'll run away from all this—and find her.

LOUISE : You haven't been drinking, have you ?

EBEN : No, but I will.

LOUISE : If you haven't been drinking, there's even less excuse for this raving.

EBEN : You think it's raving, father ?

STANHOPE : I think it is too uncontrolled.

EBEN : The last day we'll ever be in her house, the last day it will be her house. How can we help but think of her, and feel her, and wonder what's the matter with us that something from her didn't get *in* ?

[ELSA, *wearing coat, furs, hat, has stepped inside the door. She has beauty, a soft radiance.*

ELSA (*in low thrilling voice*) : Yes, Eben. Yes !

EBEN : Elsa !

STANHOPE : Elsa !

ELSA : Father, may I—come in ?

[*One hand, palm up, goes out toward him, timidly, but eloquent.*

LOUISE : Surely——

[*But is afraid to go on,* STANHOPE *is staring so strangely at his daughter.*

TED : Hello, Elsa. How'd you get here ?

ELSA (*gratefully*) : Hello, Ted. (*To her father*) I fear I shouldn't have come. But Eben wrote me the place was being broken up and——

LOUISE : You wrote to her ?

EBEN : Yes, I write to my sister.

ELSA : I had to be here once more. I thought perhaps it's to much to ask—but I thought perhaps you'd let me sleep in Alison's room. Just—just the once. Just to-night. It would—do me good.

LOUISE (*with a shrill laugh*) : Now that's—*funny.*

[*Laughs again.*

EBEN : Nice that you're enjoying it.

ELSA (*advancing a little to her father*) : It doesn't mean you forgive me, father, if—if you don't. If you can't. But won't you just do it—because Alison would do it ? She'd take my hands. She'd say—" Little Elsa." She'd say—" Elsa has come home."

[*From upstairs, a wild cry from* JENNIE.

JENNIE (*above*) : Mr. Stanhope—everybody !—help !

[EBEN *hurries out.*

JENNIE (*off*) : Everybody—quick—the house—burning !

TED : Fire ! I smelled it !

[*He runs out*, LOUISE *goes, and* ANN. STANHOPE *does not pass his daughter without pausing a moment, looking at her.*

Outside, a confusion of voices, a running about. Only ELSA *remains as she was, as if she cannot move.*

ELSA : Just as I stepped into the house. As if—as if—(*shaking this off*) Oh, no—no. *She looks around the room softly.*)
Don't burn. Don't.

[*After another moment, having looked from one thing to another, she goes to the books, runs her hand over them. Stands there. But at a noise of something falling upstairs, she becomes frightened, suddenly takes an armful of books. Is starting out, but stopped by a confident shout from* EBEN.

EBEN (*off*) : It's all right. We're getting it ! Two more buckets, Ted !

[ELSA *sits down where Ann had sat, still holding the books, bent over them, her back to the door.*

After a moment AGATHA *steals in.* ELSA *does not hear her, and* AGATHA, *in a curious, fixed state, has not seen* ELSA. *She sits where she sat before. She is white, rigid.*

ELSA, *moving a little, drops one of the books.*

AGATHA (*not turning*) : What's that ? Who's here ?

ELSA : Aunt Agatha !

AGATHA (*still not turning, as if she can not*) : Who's that ? Who's here ?

[ELSA *goes to her, and as* AGATHA *still does not look up, sits on a stool beside her.*

Elsa.

ELSA : Yes—Elsa . . .

AGATHA : Elsa went away.

ELSA : She came back. (*Timidly*) Are you—glad ?

AGATHA : Alison was so afraid of fire.

TED (*off*) : That fixes it !

ELSA : They are getting the fire out.

AGATHA : No. Burning. All burning. All at once.

ELSA (*trying to take her hand*) : No, Aunt Agatha. You see the boys are here. They are getting the fire out. There's nothing to be afraid of.

AGATHA : I am not afraid—now.

STANHOPE (*outside*) : Agatha ! Where is she ?

[ELSA *starts up, but* AGATHA *takes her hand in a fierce grip, forcing her down.*

STANHOPE (*still off*) : Jennie ! Where's Miss Agatha ? Agatha !

ELSA (*freeing herself, going to the door*) : Here, father. Aunt Agatha is in here with me.

[STANHOPE *comes in.*

STANHOPE (*gently, as he sees her there rigid, white*) : It's all right, Agatha. Just a little blaze. Nothing whatever to worry about. The boys have it out already.

[*After staring at him,* AGATHA *leans back with a wail that goes into a whimper.*

You understand, don't you, Agatha ! They have put the fire out.

AGATHA (*with horror*) : They have put the fire out.

[*Enter* EBEN, *coat off, flushed, much excited.*

EBEN : That fire was set, father.

STANHOPE : Impossible !

EBEN : We found the charred straw, in the closet that breaks through to Alison's room—kerosene

there—and in Alison's room. Someone was trying to burn the house.

STANHOPE : But that's—incredible. *Why ?* Oh, no, you're mistaken.

EBEN : It's undeniable. The evidence is right there.

STANHOPE (*going to the door*) : Jennie !

[AGATHA *leans away, as if avoiding something.*

ELSA *holds her hand.*

Jennie ! (*Turning*) I don't believe a word of it !

[*Enter* JENNIE.

What do you know about this fire ?

JENNIE (*distraught, almost crying*) : I don't know anything about it. I smelled the smoke. I ran up. It was burning—in the closet.

[*Enter* LOUISE.

LOUISE : The fire was set. Someone tried to burn the house.

STANHOPE (*To* JENNIE) : Who's been here ?

JENNIE : Nobody. Nobody. Just the family—and me—and Michael.

STANHOPE : Who's been upstairs ?

LOUISE : That reporter was upstairs.

STANHOPE : Why, you've all lost your wits ! What possible reason—— ?

LOUISE : But no other stranger was upstairs.

[STANHOPE *looks at her a moment, incredulous, dazed. Starts for the door.*

ANN *comes in.*

STANHOPE : Ann, what do you know about this reporter ?

ANN : Why, I don't know anything about him.

LOUISE : Perhaps it isn't a reporter. Perhaps it's —some hostility to the family.

STANHOPE (*angrily*) : That is ridiculous.

LOUISE : Well, who did it ? Why ?

STANHOPE : How did the fellow seem to you ?

ANN : He seemed all right. I thought he was just what he said he was. I'm sure he's all right. He showed me a poem he had written.

LOUISE : As if that proves anything ! Had you known him before ?

ANN (*indignant at the tone*) : I had never seen him before.

STANHOPE (*going to the door. Sharply*) : Ted !

TED (*from above*) : Staying up here to make sure !

STANHOPE : Leave Michael on watch. Come down here at once !

EBEN : I can't make head or tail of it. Who would want to burn the house ?

ANN (*distressed*) : Mightn't it have just—happened ?

LOUISE (*scornfully*) : " Happened ? " Straw—saturated with kerosene ?

[*Enter* TED.

STANHOPE : Now what about you and this reporter ?

TED : Well, what about us ?

STANHOPE : Answer my question !

TED : What question, father ? What about us ?

STANHOPE : You were the only people in that part of the house—and a fire was set.

TED : For—Pete's—sake ! Talk about *me* being crazy ! You think I set a fire to burn the house ?

STANHOPE (*violently*) : No ! I don't think anything of the kind ! But what did you do up there ?

TED : We looked at Aunt Alison's room. And

he talked about her that crazy way people do talk about her. And that's all.

STANHOPE : Did you have any straw up there ?

TED (*tolerantly*) : Oh, father, what would I be doing with straw ?

STANHOPE (*furiously*) : I don't know what you'd be doing with straw ! You just might have had some idea of making yourself useful !

TED : Useful enough to burn the house.

STANHOPE : Be still ! (*Turning to* JENNIE *who stands frightened by the door*) Who had straw upstairs ?

JENNIE : Nobody. Nobody's I know of.

STANHOPE : Did you take kerosene upstairs ?

JENNIE (*beginning to cry*) : I did not. I did not take kerosene upstairs.

STANHOPE : Very well, Jennie. I believe you. But who—— (*In looking around, bewildered, his eye falls on the tea-set. Slowly he moves over to it, then looks at his sister, who is still in that strange, fixed state. An idea comes to him that is a shock. Ponders, incredulous, but the idea growing.* (*To* EBEN) Straw—you say ? (*Moves nearer* AGATHA. *Speaks gently*) Agatha, why did you unpack the tea-set, after Ann had packed it for you ?

JENNIE : Oh !

[*All look at her. She goes from the room.*

AGATHA : What ? What's that you say ? Tea-set ?

STANHOPE : Yes. Why did you unpack it, after Ann had packed it for you ?

AGATHA : I can pack my own mother's tea-set, can't I ?

STANHOPE (*gently*) : But you accepted her doing it for you. (*Silence, after which he speaks carefully*) Agatha, what did you do with the straw the dishes were packed in ?

AGATHA (*as a wail*) : O-h ! I wish you'd all go away, and leave me here alone ! Why couldn't you *let it burn* ?

STANHOPE : Agatha ! Is it *true* ? Do you love the house so much you'd *burn* it—rather than —leave it ?

AGATHA : No !—not for that. I love it—too much to want to harm a hair of its head. (*Not speaking to any of them now*) But what could I *do* ? I tried—and tried. Burn them ? All by themselves ? (*In a whisper*) It was—too lonely.

[*She falls back.*

STANHOPE : Get brandy, quick. And the doctor.

[LOUISE *goes out, and* TED.

AGATHA (*resolutely sitting up*) : I don't want the doctor.

[*But she again falls back.*

ELSA : Are you all right, Aunt Agatha ?

AGATHA (*looking up at* ELSA) : Couldn't take them away—and couldn't—*couldn't*—

CURTAIN

SCENE : *As Act I. It is the same day, three o'clock in the afternoon.* ANN *is at her typewriter ;* STANHOPE *at the table, on which is a box of papers. He crumples the one he was looking at, throws it to the floor, where there is a heap of discarded papers. He takes some of them to the fireplace, stands watching them burn.*

STANHOPE (*turning*) : Well, we must get on with it. (*Sitting down, examines another paper*) Receipt for a carriage, twenty-eight years old. People used to keep everything. (*Crumples it, throws it to the floor.*) I sometimes took your mother driving in that carriage.

ANN : You were so good to mother.

STANHOPE (*softly, with a sigh*) : I hope so. (*After a moment of dreaming*) Remember how she used to sit by the fire, in that blue velvet dress, in that chair she liked——

ANN : Chippendale.

STANHOPE : Leaning back a little, yet erect, her hands, so long and white, loosely clasped on an arm of it.

ANN : I can see her.

STANHOPE : You look like her, Ann.

ANN : Not so good-looking.

STANHOPE (*smiling*) : Not quite. But who could be ?

ANN : It will be nine years in January.

STANHOPE : Nine years. (*With an effort coming from this, handing her a package of old papers*) Just make the lists of what these deeds are, keep the latest one of each and put the others in an envelope marked " Old Deeds."

[EBEN *enters carrying a large box.*

EBEN : This finishes in the attic. Seems to be mostly old newspapers.

STANHOPE (*taking one*) : James G. Blaine.

EBEN (*who is looking at another*) : Why, the old hotel was standing then. The one that burned when I was a kid. Remember going to the fire. (*Turning a page, laughing*) Did you know the Baileys had sued the McMasters, about stealing a stallion for breeding ?

STANHOPE : That stallion was in the courts a long time.

EBEN : And now the McMasters are worth—more than we'll ever see. Shall we keep these ?

STANHOPE : Where ?

EBEN : I don't know. I think they ought to stay right here. That everything should stay where it is.

STANHOPE : Don't start that again. Don't you think it's harder for me than you. I was born here. Grew up here.

EBEN : That's why. And Alison.

STANHOPE : And Agatha. She can't be left here any longer. You can see that now. And she won't go while we keep the place. Too bad we got that fire out.

EBEN : That was a funny thing. Aunt Agatha must be—pretty bad—trying that with us all right here.

STANHOPE : She kept talking about anything else being too lonely.

EBEN : I think she had something she wanted to burn, and couldn't.

STANHOPE : Yes.

EBEN : What ?

STANHOPE : I don't know. Just some old thing she cherished, and didn't want to take from the house.

EBEN : Something about Alison ?

STANHOPE : Perhaps.

EBEN : Father, we did publish all the poems, didn't we ?

STANHOPE : We gave them all to Professor Burroughs. He took all except a few he thought weren't so good. Those I have, as you know.

EBEN : Letters from Alison, perhaps.

STANHOPE : Each of us has his own. Agatha has the letters Alison wrote to her. They're not many, for they were so seldom apart. Of course, if she wants to burn her own letters, she has that right. Though I wish she wouldn't. She should leave them to the children.

EBEN : Seems very strange to me.

STANHOPE : Yes. Well, it's just because she has become strange. The Centennial Exposition—1876. Oh, we can't burn these papers. They've been kept too long. Save them for the children.

EBEN : We're keeping more now than we know where to put.

STANHOPE : Louise can find a place for them. To-morrow these will be the newspapers of a former century.

EBEN : You going up to the dance, Ann ?

ANN (*shaking her head*) : No.

STANHOPE (*putting down his paper*) : Why, I never thought of the dance. Of course you must go, Ann.

ANN : There's so much to do here. I'd rather help.

EBEN : What did you turn Walter away for ?

STANHOPE : What's that ? Have you quarrelled with Walter ?

ANN : No. I didn't quarrel with him. I just got tired hearing how fast he could run.

STANHOPE : Ted's going up with the Logans. You go with them, and go to the dance with Ted.

ANN : Ted's taking May McMasters.

STANHOPE : Sometimes I think that boy hasn't a grain of sense. But it's New Year's Eve. You must go to the dance.

ANN (*smiling*) : Please, Mr. Stanhope, if you don't mind my staying here, to begin early in the morning——

EBEN : Shouldn't have given Walter the sack till he was starting back to New Haven.

ANN : I didn't give him the sack. We just decided to run in different directions.

STANHOPE : But aren't you and Louise going to the dance, Eben ?

EBEN (*shaking his head*) : I'm bored with their dances.

STANHOPE : I fear you're bored with too much, son.

EBEN : Fear so. But anyway, with Elsa here—and the last night in the old place——

STANHOPE : It's good of you.

EBEN (*brightly*) : Oh, no.

[STANHOPE *again begins looking through the box of papers on the table.*

TED *comes in, sits at the desk, takes his unfinished letter from the pigeon-hole, glares at it.*

TED : I'll be flunked.

EBEN (*not looking up from his newspaper*) : Might try a little study, for a change.

TED : Tell me something to tell him, father.

STANHOPE : Have you begun that again ?

TED : About her conservatory. Keeping her flowers warm in winter. How did she keep them warm ?

[*The others go on with what they are doing.*

Well, how do you keep flowers warm ? Do you

wrap them in cotton? Straw, maybe. What do you suppose Aunt Agatha wanted to burn the house for?

STANHOPE : Because she is feeble, and very sad.

TED : But I thought she liked the house. (*To* ANN) Make a good story for that reporter!

EBEN : Run out and find him. Tell him all the news!

TED : He's still around. Saw him in the village. And now he's down along the river, walking where Alison walked. He's crazy. Nice, though. What flowers, father? Geraniums? (*Writes*) Loved geraniums.

STANHOPE (*so sharply* TED *jumps*) : Edward! You have very little sense of family, or very little sense of anything. But perhaps you have sense enough to know what it would mean if your allowance stopped.

TED : Yes, father. I have the kind of sense that can understand that.

STANHOPE : Very well then! No stories about the family—about the fire—to this reporter or your teacher or anyone else.

TED : You don't know my situation, father. . . . It's dark. (*Returns to his letter; turns meekly*) It's all right to write about flowers, isn't it? (*Turning back to the letter*) Violets.

[*Begins to sing* "*Every morn I bring thee violets.*"
There are voices in the hall. JENNIE *enters.*

JENNIE : Mr. and Mrs. Hodges are here.

STANHOPE (*low, with irritation*) : They weren't to come again until we were out of the house.

EBEN : Send them away.

STANHOPE (*decisively, after hesitation*) : No. Perhaps we can close the deal. Very well, Jennie. Ask them to come in.

[*She goes.*

But Agatha mustn't know.

EBEN : She's still lying down in her room.

STANHOPE : Who's with her ?

EBEN : Elsa.

TED : How do you spell mignonette ?

EBEN : F-o-o-l.

TED : That spells Eben.

[*Enter* MR. *and* MRS. HODGES. *He is a small, lean, shrewd-faced man. His wife is larger and has a big, rather foolish face.*

HODGES : Well ! How'd do, everybody.

STANHOPE : How do you do, Mr. Hodges ? How are you to-day, Mrs. Hodges ?

MRS. HODGES : Oh, I keep going.

[EBEN *brings a chair for her.*

HODGES : Well, guess you weren't expecting us.

STANHOPE : No, not to-day.

HODGES : Like to decide between this place and another we got in mind. Other's in better repair.

EBEN : Then you'd better take that one.

HODGES : Well, I dunno. My wife kind of turns to this one. Thinks she could fix it up pretty—woman's notions.

MRS. HODGES : I think, with piazzas down stairs and up, it would be nice for my summer boarders.

STANHOPE (*rather faintly*) : Summer boarders ?

HODGES : That's how we calculate. Don't think a poor man like me'd buy this ramshackle old place for just my old woman and those two young 'uns, do you ? But we'd have to fix it all up. Paint her a bright yellow, maybe, with green edgin'—somethin' you can *see*. Summer boarders wouldn't take to a grey house edged with a red you can't tell for red.

Mrs. Hodges : I could make that conservatory into a sun parlour where they could sit when it rained.

Hodges : But 'twould mean a big outlay, 'cause we'd have to cut it up in more rooms.

[The Stanhopes *are silent.*

Mrs. Hodges (*feeling she must break the pause*) : Nobody could pay what'd be right to pay for rooms that big.

Hodges : Well, folks don't need rooms so big now.

Mrs. Hodges : Hard to take care of.

Hodges : But it's in bad repair, Mr. Stanhope.

Stanhope (*with effort*) : Oh, I don't think so. The roof needs just a little mending, but the foundations are good.

Mrs. Hodges : Looks a good deal run down, Mr. Stanhope. (*Fearing she has been impolite*) Of course, you haven't been living here yourself. You have your nice place in town. But for summer boarders 'twould need a lot of paint and varnish, and that new wallpaper that's more lively like.

Hodges : All those things cost. They cost.

Stanhope : Certainly. But we feel our price is low. The house has—character.

Hodges : Character. (*Rubbing his chin*) Well, maybe so. But *what* character ? Not the character for summer boarders. That's what I tell the old lady here. And how do I know there'd be any boarders ?

Eben (*cheerfully*) : There might not.

Hodges : Just what I say. Folks like to go up the river nowadays, not down the river. And with the old Mississippi rising higher every year, seems like she'd wash this place away 'fore we could get dead and buried.

Eben : Then you could have a house-boat.

HODGES : How ? (*Laughs loudly.*) Yes, that's a joke. (*To his wife*) Summer boarders on a house-boat.

STANHOPE (*courteous, but cold*) : Just why did you come in to-day, Mr. Hodges ?

HODGES : Want to take one more look at her, 'fore we give her up. Try to figure out where we could put in partitions—modernise. Outside, too —needs a lot. Too many trees makes a place gloomy.

EBEN : Those trees have been growing a long time.

HODGES : Well, then, they've been growing long enough, haven't they ?

[*Laughing ; waiting for* EBEN *to join him, but* EBEN *does not.*

And that lilac hedge. Shuts the place in too much. What's the use putting your money in a place nobody can see ? Take out some of that tangled old stuff and put in flower-beds in fancy shapes. Heart-shaped, maybe. You'd be surprised the difference it would make.

EBEN (*softly*) : No, I wouldn't be surprised. (*Speaking more brightly*) Now here's an interesting thing, Mr. Hodges. You aren't sure you want to buy, and we aren't sure we want to sell.

HODGES (*to* STANHOPE, *sharply*) : Not want to sell ? But you made me a proposition, and I've gone to the expense of getting a carpenter to figure on it.

STANHOPE : I will stand by what I said. But you will have to make up your minds. We have other possibilities for the place.

HODGES : Now there you surprise me, Mr. Stanhope. You certainly do surprise me. And I'm very much afraid you'd be disappointed in those other parties. Don't think anybody else'd be fool enough to buy it. Now that's my opinion,

if you want my opinion. Know darn well I wouldn't buy it, 'cept my old woman's got the idea, and when a woman gets an idea you might as well give up.

STANHOPE : I think Mrs. Hodges' idea is—practical.

MRS. HODGES (*nodding and smiling*) : They could go out in row-boats. Take their lunch over to the island, and that would get them out of the house, part of the time.

EBEN : I think you'd make more leaving the house as it is, and getting people who would——

STANHOPE (*low*) : Never mind, Eben.

HODGES : No. No, there you're wrong, young man. Summer boarders want things modern, and cheerful. But I tell you what bothers me, Mr. Stanhope. The place ain't healthy.

STANHOPE : I grew up here. I'm healthy.

HODGES : Seems like the river had something against this place. Right here on this bend's where she washes in more and more.

EBEN : Yes, Mr. Hodges, I really think you would die of rheumatism, shortly before you were drowned.

HODGES : How ? (*Laughing*) He jokes, don't he ? Well, my brother Ed. used to joke. Never could figure out what Ed. was getting at.

STANHOPE : I can't figure out just what you are getting at, Mr. Hodges. We are very busy here to-day. Do you want the place, or not ?

HODGES : Well, now, that depends.

STANHOPE : You weren't coming again until we had left the house.

HODGES : That's right, so we weren't. But the carpenter's coming Friday—make an estimate. Like to look it over once more ourselves, get a few ideas of our own, for I know damn well—

excuse me, miss (*bending over to nod to* ANN, *who has been going ahead with her work*)—what he'll try to do.

EBEN (*softly*) : Yes. Carpenters are very expensive now.

HODGES : They are that. So we'll just have a look at them upstairs rooms, Mr. Stanhope. See how we can portion 'em out.

STANHOPE : I am sorry not to fall in with your plans, but my sister is up there, and she is ill.

MRS. HODGES : That so ? Miss Stanhope ailing ? Well, she's—getting along, isn't she ?

STANHOPE : Yes. She is.

HODGES : Well, we all got to get old some time. That's what I say. No use to fret.

MRS. HODGES : We wouldn't ask to go in her room, Mr. Stanhope. And we'd keep quiet—just whisper. I have sick headaches myself.

STANHOPE (*giving up, after considering*) : I suppose it can't be helped. Will you go with them, Eben ?

EBEN : Awfully busy here.

STANHOPE : Ted ! No, Ann, please. And very quietly, that I ask you.

MRS. HODGES (*in a whisper, and tip-toeing*) : We'll go—like this.

[*Exit the* HODGES, *with* ANN.

EBEN : I don't think we could possibly do worse.

STANHOPE : I don't think we could do better.

EBEN : They'll destroy it.

STANHOPE : I want it destroyed.

EBEN (*coldly*) : You do ? I care for it.

STANHOPE : I care for it so much I don't want —itself, to go to someone else.

EBEN : That sounds more like Aunt Agatha than you, father.

STANHOPE : Very well, Agatha and I are the only two left. Listen now ! Ted ! Leave that foolishness ! Try and do something with your own brains, not trading on your Aunt Alison ! Are you listening ?

TED : Yes, sir.

STANHOPE : And don't ask me how to spell anything !

TED : No, sir.

STANHOPE : Some day, when I'm gone, you'll talk about this again, and wonder why I sold it, and blame me. And perhaps you'll be right, but I'm using the best judgment I've got. Agatha cannot be left here. Her heart's feeble, and her mind—not what it was. If the place remained, she'd come back here, and you know it as well as I do.

EBEN : She couldn't be left here—with a nurse ?

STANHOPE : That might be all right about her heart. Not her mind.

EBEN : She's old to transplant.

STANHOPE : And we're not doing it well. All the confusion. And now—Elsa.

EBEN : She loves Elsa. Elsa doesn't harm anybody—except herself.

STANHOPE : She harmed all of us. She disgraced us.

EBEN : Maybe she couldn't help it.

STANHOPE : " Couldn't help it ! " What a weak defence. Alison helped it, and so did I.

EBEN : What did you say, father ?

STANHOPE : Never mind what I said. The only person in this family who has any sense of family is Louise, and she's another family.

EBEN : Oh, Louise takes it too hard.

STANHOPE : She goes at it wrong, but she's the only one wants what I want.

TED (*hopefully entering the conversation*) : And what is that, father ?

STANHOPE : Hold a family together. Have some pride.

TED : I got a great idea. Redeem family fortune. Fellow at school's worked out a new idea for putting on rubber tires. Like to go in with him, soon's our sentence expires at Cambridge.

STANHOPE : You will go in your father's office, which was his father's before him, and you will try and show more interest in the business than your brother does.

TED : Sometimes I think I haven't just the mind that makes a lawyer.

EBEN : Oh, I think you have.

STANHOPE : What do you mean ? The law is a noble profession.

TED : Thought I might do better in some kind of a rubber-wheel business.

EBEN : I tell you, father ; suppose I take a year off.

STANHOPE : Seems to me you've taken ten years off.

EBEN : Sometimes I feel I want something else.

STANHOPE : What ?

EBEN : I don't know.

STANHOPE : And what about your family ?

EBEN : Oh, that's why I'm going.

STANHOPE : You are not going !

EBEN : Probably not.

STANHOPE : Going where ?

EBEN : I don't know. Somewhere—where things are different.

STANHOPE : Things are not different anywhere.

EBEN : Sometimes I think, if I didn't have to do anything for a while, I could do something.

STANHOPE : What ?

EBEN : Don't know yet.

STANHOPE : You have your children.

EBEN : Louise's.

STANHOPE : Well, you couldn't very well have had them alone, could you ? Come, Eben, don't talk like a weakling. What if you aren't perfectly happy with Louise ? I wasn't happy with your mother, either ; but I didn't run away, leaving my children to shift for themselves.

EBEN : It isn't just Louise—or, I suppose not. It's things I used to think about when I was with Alison. And still think about—when she's with me.

STANHOPE : Alison didn't desert her family.

EBEN : No, but I don't write poetry.

STANHOPE : Oh, dear.

EBEN : Never mind, father. Guess I'm just talking foolishly, because the old place is being broken up.

STANHOPE : It's a time to put your shoulder to the wheel.

EBEN : All right. Where's the wheel ?

STANHOPE : Here (*pushing toward him the box of papers on the table*).

[EBEN *begins on these ; his father, too, has taken out a handful of them.*

TED (*after crumpling a sheet of his letter*) : Tell you what, Eben, I got an idea.

EBEN : Doubt it.

TED : You do something for me, I'll do something for you.

EBEN : What ?

TED : Well, give you an interest in taking off rubber tires.

EBEN : Thanks. Got too many interests already. (*Showing a paper to his father*) This any good ?

TED : Well, I'll run away with Louise.

EBEN : That's better.

STANHOPE : Don't talk such nonsense.

TED : Kidnap her. And you write me a theme about Alison. I'm two behind. " Alison knows," you could call it.

EBEN : So I could.

TED : Just write the way you talk. Sounds funny in talk, but written it would look all right.

EBEN (*with a real interest, which makes his father look at him*) : Do you think so ?

TED : About the little presents, and—oh, the things she used to say to you. How she looked, and moved around, and why she was different from other folks.

EBEN : I would like to do that.

TED : Fine ! Dandy !

STANHOPE : Did you ever try to write, Eben ?

EBEN : I used to write things, and show them to Alison.

STANHOPE : I never knew that.

EBEN : No. No one else knew. Oh—Elsa.

STANHOPE : And did you keep it up ?

EBEN : Not after I was married.

TED : It's a bargain ! You help me get through

college, and I'll put you on your feet—financially speaking, on your feet.

EBEN (*thinking of something else*) : Thanks, awfully.

TED : Don't mention it.

[*Enter* LOUISE.

LOUISE : Elsa isn't staying here, is she ?

STANHOPE : To-night.

LOUISE : Then I'm not staying.

EBEN : Family feeling.

LOUISE : Exactly. I'm sorry, Father Stanhope, but I can't stay in the house with Elsa. She ran away with the husband of my best friend, leaving——

EBEN : Father knows just what she did, Louise.

LOUISE : How could I ever face Margaret again, if I'd stayed under the roof with Elsa ?

EBEN : Monstrous idea—staying under the roof with Elsa.

LOUISE : I am sorry to say it is.

STANHOPE : And I am sorry, Louise, but in that case you will have to go up with the Logans and Ted.

LOUISE : I don't think I should be the one to be turned out !

STANHOPE : I am not turning you out ; but neither am I turning Elsa out—not to-night.

LOUISE : Was there any reason for her coming, other than to make trouble ?

STANHOPE : She felt there was a reason, apparently.

TED : And I'm glad she came. Why shouldn't she ?

LOUISE : Yes, indeed, why shouldn't she ! Much

you know about it—or care—what the town says. It will be known she's here, and just stir it all up !

EBEN : This isn't very pleasant for father, Louise.

LOUISE : Did I create the situation ?

EBEN : You seem to be creating this one.

LOUISE : I am sorry for father—sorrier than anyone. But there is nothing to do about Elsa except condemn her.

EBEN : The Logans are coming at four, aren't they, Ted ?

LOUISE : You side with her—against me, your wife.

EBEN : You take too much pleasure in siding against her. She's had enough, hasn't she ?

LOUISE : She brought it on herself.

EBEN : If you're so thick with Margaret, you might persuade her to be decent enough to get a divorce.

LOUISE : She does not believe in divorce. She is standing by her principles.

EBEN : She is standing by her thirst for revenge.

LOUISE : Oh, of course you think *she's* the one in the wrong ! You think——

STANHOPE : Don't quarrel, children. Elsa did wrong ; Louise is right there. But I am not turning her out—not to-night.

LOUISE : Then I go.

EBEN (*cheerfully*) : Good-bye.

LOUISE : A husband should be loyal to his wife !

EBEN : Who says so ?

LOUISE : Now you're talking foolishly again ! As if you hadn't good sense. Everyone says so—everyone.

EBEN (*after turning a paper*) : No they don't.

LOUISE : But they *do*. A husband should be loyal to his wife. Isn't that so, Father Stanhope ?

STANHOPE : Certainly.

EBEN : Why " certainly," father ? If a wife steals —murders——

LOUISE : Steals ? Murders ? Do I steal, murder ?

[*She waits for a reply which does not come.*

TED : Tell you what, Louise, let's you and me take a little trip.

[LOUISE *can only stare.*

Take you to Cambridge with me. Quite a good deal going on. You'd probably like it.

LOUISE (*slowly, to* STANHOPE) : I just don't know what to make of this family. I do not know what to make of them.

EBEN : You can't make anything of them, Louise. I think the idea of a little trip with Ted——

STANHOPE (*bringing down his hand*) : Stop that nonsense !

LOUISE (*observing* HODGE'S *cap and muffler on the chair*) : Who is here ?

STANHOPE : The Hodges.

LOUISE : Where are they ?

STANHOPE : They are looking over the house.

LOUISE : Who's with them ? Who is showing them around ?

STANHOPE : Ann.

LOUISE : Ann ? But why Ann ? Why an outsider ?

STANHOPE : Oh, I don't consider Ann an outsider.

LOUISE (*forcing herself to speak respectfully*) : But she is an outsider, Father Stanhope. She's your

secretary. She's not a member of the family. (*After a silence*) Is she?

STANHOPE : She is as dear to me as my own daughter. Well—no, not that.

LOUISE (*gently*) : Of course, father, I know Elsa can't be dear to you—now.

STANHOPE : Elsa is dear to me, though I've lost her.

EBEN : Don't say that, father.

STANHOPE : Isn't it true?

LOUISE : You have me, father.

STANHOPE : Yes. Yes, thank you, Louise.

[*There are voices on the stairs. the* HODGES *enter,* ANN *leaving them at the door.*

LOUISE (*capably taking hold of it*) : How do you do, Mrs. Hodges? Though perhaps you don't know me. I am Mrs. Eben Stanhope.

MRS. HODGES : How'd do, Mrs. Stanhope.

HODGES : Pleased to meet you, mam.

LOUISE : Of course, you are seeing the house in great confusion. But we'll have everything out of here soon.

MRS. HODGES : Oh, that's all right.

HODGES : Quite a chore—moving.

LOUISE : It's a *dear* old place, isn't it?

HODGES : Well, we think it's dear enough.

[*Looks slyly at* EBEN.

LOUISE : So roomy, and well built. And such *traditions.*

HODGES : How?

MRS. HODGES : It's for my summer boarders—if we take it.

LOUISE : Now, Mrs. Hodges, I think that's an *excellent* idea. So practical. Do you know, I've

thought the same thing myself. It's really too big for a family, but for summer boarders—right here on the river—the woods all around. Quite likely I can send you some people.

MRS. HODGES : Oh, *that* would be nice.

HODGES : Right clever of you, mam.

LOUISE : And that big cheerful kitchen to cook for them ! I wonder how many people used to be cooked for in that kitchen, father ?

STANHOPE : A good many.

LOUISE : And now again the house will be full of people having a good time. That's a nice idea for us, too, isn't it, father ?

[STANHOPE *tries to reply, but does not speak.*

You see we love the house. It's a real grief to us, giving it up. But it's too big for a family. That's why we're letting you have it.

HODGES (*slyly*) : Very good of you, mam.

EBEN : Quite philanthropic.

HODGES : How ? (*Bursting out laughing*) He jokes, don't he ?

LOUISE : Yes. Jokes.

STANHOPE (*abruptly*) : Do you want the house, Hodges ?

HODGES : Yes.

STANHOPE (*who seems stunned*) : Good. (*With effort*) Sign up for it now ?

HODGES (*sitting down at the table, taking out his cheque book*) : Bind the bargain.

STANHOPE (*resolutely*) : Good. Then come in the office—to-morrow's New Year's—— Come Thursday, and we'll go over the deed. You'll find everything in order.

LOUISE (*to* MRS. HODGES) : You see, there are

no complications. The place has been in the family from the first.

[STANHOPE *is staring ahead, and does not see the cheque* HODGES *holds out to him.*

HODGES : A hundred fifty. That all right ?

STANHOPE : Yes. Quite all right.

HODGES : Well, now we'll be out of your way. Soon's you go out, we come in.

STANHOPE : Very good.

LOUISE : And I know you're going to enjoy it, just as much as we did.

MRS. HODGES : You must come to see us sometime.

LOUISE : Indeed we will.

HODGES : Guess you won't hardly know the old place, once we take hold.

MRS. HODGES : We're going to paint—modernise.

LOUISE : That's just what it needs.

HODGES : Well, Thursday then.

STANHOPE : Thursday.

HODGES : How's ten ?

STANHOPE : Let us say ten. (*Rising*) Good day, Mrs. Hodges.

MRS. HODGES : Good day, Mr. Stanhope. And I hope your sister will find herself more smart for the moving.

STANHOPE : Thank you. I hope so.

HODGES : Well, 'bye folks. (*To* EBEN, *laughing*) Couldn't crack another joke, could you ?

EBEN : Couldn't possibly.

HODGES (*to* LOUISE) : Always nice to have a cheerful member of the family.

LOUISE : Yes, isn't it nice ?

[LOUISE *starts out with them.*

HODGES : We go out the back way. Got the tea there.

[STANHOPE, *sinking to his chair, holds the cheque, staring at it.*

EBEN (*bitterly*) : So that ends——

[*But observing his father, doesn't go on.*

TED : Well, so it's sold. Gee ! Now it isn't ours any more. What you getting for it, father ?

[*His father does not seem to hear.*

Enter JENNIE.

JENNIE : He's here again.

EBEN : Who ?

JENNIE : Him. That reporter that didn't set fire to the house.

EBEN : We can't see a reporter now.

JENNIE : It isn't you he wants. It's Miss Ann.

STANHOPE (*sharply*) : What for ?

KNOWLES (*stepping inside the door*) : Afraid I'll have to explain that myself. Only, well, you see. Awfully sorry to bother you, but what else could I do ?

[JENNIE, *wanting to linger, is putting to rights some things on the window-seat.*

STANHOPE : I can think of a number of other things you might have done.

KNOWLES (*smiling*) : What ?

STANHOPE : Gone back to Chicago.

KNOWLES : Without seeing her, you mean ?

STANHOPE : But why do you wish to see Miss Leslie ?

KNOWLES : *Is that* her name ?

STANHOPE : That is her name, but you haven't said why you wish to see her.

KNOWLES (*flushing*) : Well, that's hard to say—to you.

STANHOPE : Then I'm afraid you can't see her.

TED (*in warning voice*) : Be kind, father. Be kind.

STANHOPE : Anything you wish to ask my secretary you can ask me.

KNOWLES : Sorry to disagree, Mr. Stanhope, but, really, I can't.

STANHOPE : Something about my sister Alison ?

KNOWLES : Well, yes, indirectly.

STANHOPE : Oh, we've had enough of that.

KNOWLES : I haven't.

STANHOPE : We are unable to give you more time.

KNOWLES : But excuse me again, it isn't your time I want.

TED : You'll just have to tell him straight out. When people get older they have to be told.

STANHOPE (*angrily*) : Is that so ?

TED : Yes, sir.

KNOWLES : It hasn't anything to do with the paper.

STANHOPE : Then I understand it even less.

KNOWLES : I wanted to ask her to take a walk with me.

STANHOPE : You don't even know her name, and you expect her to take a walk with you ?

KNOWLES : I don't expect, exactly. I hope.

TED : There's a difference.

STANHOPE : Indeed ?

TED (*meekly*) : Yes, sir.

STANHOPE (*heatedly*) : But why do you want to take a walk with her ?

TED : Oh—*gee*. 'Cause he *likes* her. You don't have to know a girl's name to like her.

KNOWLES : No, you don't. Though it's a very nice name, Ann Leslie. It suits her, I think.

STANHOPE (*after looking at him some time*) : Jennie, tell Miss Ann a gentleman is here to see her.

[JENNIE *goes.*

KNOWLES : Thank you, sir. I thought about it a long time, and I didn't know any way to see her but just walk in and ask for her.

STANHOPE (*who seems confused*) : No doubt it was better than throwing stones at the window.

TED : Or you might have set fire to the house. (*As his father pushes his chair back angrily*) Well, then she would have run out, wouldn't she ?

[*He and* KNOWLES *laugh.*

STANHOPE : Eben, have you decided which books you want to take ?

[*They walk over to the books, into the alcove.*

KNOWLES : You know, I think all your family have something of the spirit of Alison Stanhope.

TED : Oh, gee, I don't.

KNOWLES : Yes, coming in fresh, I can tell better than you. It's as if something of her remained here, in you all, in—in quite a different form.

TED : Different, all right.

KNOWLES : A—playfulness.

TED : Golly, you think we're playful ? Why, man, we're going through the blackest page of our history. As for me, I can't decide which room to choose.

KNOWLES : Choose ?

TED : To hang myself.

KNOWLES : The river's handy.

TED : Good swimmer. Can you write themes ?

KNOWLES : You bet.

TED : Write one for me, about playfulness, or suicide, or something, and I'll—I got a lot of influence with Ann.

KNOWLES : Maybe you're in love with her.

TED : No. Always been around the house a lot. Too much like a sister. Anyway, Ann's pretty old.

KNOWLES : She is not old !

TED : She's twenty-three !

KNOWLES : I'm twenty-five.

TED : Well, then she isn't old for you.

KNOWLES : I'm glad she has this nice position.

TED : It isn't a position.

KNOWLES : What is it then ?

TED : Oh, it's just—the way it is.

[*Enter* ANN. TED *returns to his letter, whistling* "*The Stars and Stripes.*"

KNOWLES : I thought perhaps you'd take a walk with me.

ANN (*startled, confused*) : You did ?

KNOWLES : Got my nerve, haven't I ?

ANN : Why, I don't know.

TED : Better not go, Ann. You might take cold.

KNOWLES : No theme.

TED (*softly*) : Oh, yes. Clever work. (*Rising*) Well, I'm not going to take a walk, thank you just as much. Got to two-step a hundred miles to-night.

[*Goes to the door, whistling to step.*

My advice to you, Ann, as one of your natural protectors, is not to go. What do we know about this young man ? Never trust anybody from Chicago.

KNOWLES : I was born in Grand Rapids.

TED : You see ? We hadn't even known where he was born. And we don't know yet what his grandfather did.

KNOWLES : He made shoes.

TED : That's why he has to walk. Bum joke.

ANN : No joke at all.

TED (*sadly*) : No joke at all.

[*He goes.*

KNOWLES : It's true you don't know anything about me. But how will you ever know, if I don't have a chance to tell you? Now don't say you don't want to know.

ANN : I haven't said it.

KNOWLES : If we don't take a walk now, we'll never take a walk in this century. Had you thought of that?

ANN : I hadn't, to tell the truth.

[EBEN *comes in with an armful of books.*

KNOWLES : The sun of this century is setting.

[*He has said it as a matter of fact, but is himself caught into its large implication.*

EBEN, *who has put his books on the table, stands, a little bowed, in thought.*

ANN (*softly*) : Yes.

[EBEN *goes back into the alcove.*

KNOWLES : I was walking down there by the river.

[*While he is speaking,* STANHOPE *is seen at the opening of the alcove, his back to them, looking at books. He takes out a small volume, opening it.*

And I didn't know whether I was thinking of Alison Stanhope, or thinking of you. Well, guess you were part of the same thing. And I was thinking of the last day of the century getting dim.

[STANHOPE *is listening, though he has not turned.*

You know, how you think of a lot of things at once. I thought of how she used to walk where I was walking.

[STANHOPE *turns, though they do not see him.*

And never will again. But it was as if her thoughts were there. They must have been hers, for they were better than mine. And it seemed to me, if you would walk there with me —you and I together—well, that she wouldn't be gone. (*Abruptly*) You think I'm crazy ?

ANN : No. No, I don't.

KNOWLES : Perhaps I could even write a poem about it ; how the river flowed to the sea, as her century flowed—to eternity.

STANHOPE (*quietly*) : I think a walk might do you good, Ann.

KNOWLES : *Thank* you, sir.

ANN : Well, just a little walk. I'll get my things.

KNOWLES : Fine !

[*She goes.*

(*Rather timidly, to* STANHOPE *who stands as he was, and holding open the little book*) It must be hard for you, leaving this old house.

STANHOPE : It is hard.

[*He feels the book in his hands, looks at it, looks at the young man, goes to him, holding it out.*

This is a book my sister Alison loved and used.

KNOWLES (*taking it*) : Emerson's Poems.

(*Looking through it*) Did *she* mark it ?

[STANHOPE *nods.*

STANHOPE : I was going to take it for myself. But she loved to make her little gifts. So, for her on the last day of her century, I would like to give it to you.

KNOWLES (*incredulous*) : You *would* ? Oh, *thank* you, sir. (*Feeling the book as something precious*) I can't tell you how—— Why I can hardly believe it ! I never in my life heard of anything more generous.

STANHOPE (*a little embarrassed*) : Oh, no ; no, not at all.

KNOWLES (*looking at the book, begins to read aloud what he sees*) :

" Hast thou named all the birds, without a gun ;
Loved the wood-rose, and left it on its stalk ;
At rich men's tables eaten bread and pulse ;
Unarmed, faced danger with a heart of trust ;
And loved so well a high behaviour
In man or maid, that thou from speech refrained,
Nobility more nobly to repay ?—
Oh, be my friend, and teach me to be thine ! "

[*Pause.*

It's called " Forbearance."

STANHOPE (*simply*) : Thank you. (*Holds out his hand for the book*) I will read you one—because you are a poet. (*Turns a few pages.*)

KNOWLES : I'm afraid——

STANHOPE : It is called " The House."

" There is no architect
Can build as the muse can ;
She is skilful to select
Materials for her plan ;

Slow and warily to choose
Rafters of immortal pine,

[*He glances up to the beamed ceiling above.*

Or cedar incorruptible,
Worthy her design.

[*Looking ahead.*

Some other things, and then—
She lays her beams in music,
In music every one,
To the cadence of the whirling world
Which dances round the sun.

That so they shall not be displaced
By lapse or by wars,
But for the love of happy souls
Outlive the newest stars."

[*He hands back the book.*

KNOWLES : Alison's house.

STANHOPE : Yes.

[EBEN *comes from the alcove with more books.*

EBEN : These all right for me, father ?

[*They look at them.* ANN *returns.*

ANN : All ready.

KNOWLES : Fine ! Well—good-bye. And thank you, again.

STANHOPE : Good-bye.

ANN : I'll be back.

[*They laugh, go out.*

EBEN : Did you notice Ann ?

STANHOPE : Yes, I noticed her. She never looked more like her mother.

EBEN : Happy.

STANHOPE : She's in love.

EBEN : In love ? (*Laughing*) Oh, come, father. She doesn't know him !

STANHOPE : Neither did Alison know him.

EBEN : It must have been—pretty tough for Alison—giving him up.

STANHOPE : You'll never know. I know a little ; no one will ever know the half. Yes, you can have the Plato, and what you want. Who will value them more than you ?

EBEN : Shall I ask Aunt Agatha, too ?

STANHOPE (*shaking his head*) : What are books to Agatha—now ?

[ELSA *comes in.*

EBEN : We're looking through the books. You must take some of them, mustn't she, father ?

STANHOPE : If she likes.

ELSA : Could I have the *David Copperfield* Alison read to us ?

EBEN (*taking it from the books he has selected*) : Here it is.

ELSA : But you were taking it.

EBEN : I have others. (*Giving it*) Take it. She read it to us when you had sprained your ankle jumping from the hayloft. Remember ?

ELSA (*looking through the book*) : I remember.

[*Reads on, smiles at something she sees.*

Aunt Agatha wants to come in here, father.

STANHOPE : The doctor said she should stay in bed.

ELSA : She won't. She's up, and she says she wants to be down here. She says anything else is too lonely.

STANHOPE : Oh, I wish it were to-morrow.

ELSA : Shall I let her come ?

STANHOPE : I don't suppose you can stop her. I'll speak to her.

[*He goes.*

EBEN : You staying long, Elsa ?

ELSA : No. How could I ?

[EBEN *is silent.*

I suppose I shouldn't have come.

EBEN : Far as I am concerned, you should. Father——

ELSA : He looks so much older.

EBEN : You made him older. Nothing ever hit him as hard.

ELSA : Oh, Eben—don't.

EBEN : Well, you've got to take it.

ELSA : Of course. But if only I could take it—all.

EBEN : You can't. That's why you had no right to do it. Alison didn't.

ELSA : No, But she was Alison. She had God.

EBEN : Afraid God left her pretty lonely at times.

ELSA : Yes. That's why she wrote about Him as if He ought to be more.

EBEN : How's Bill ?

ELSA : Bill's all right. He misses the business, and his friends, and the children. I can see him missing them.

EBEN : Lucky he has enough to live on.

ELSA : Yes. But that isn't enough.

EBEN : But you're happy ?

ELSA : Happy, and unhappy.

EBEN : What did you run away like that for ? Why didn't you talk it over with me ?

ELSA : You would have kept me from going.

EBEN : Of course I would !

ELSA : But I had to go, Eben. Don't you see ? That was the way I loved him.

EBEN (*after watching her face*) : Wish I loved someone.

ELSA : I wish you did. (*Listening*) They're coming.

[*She arranges the big chair.*

AGATHA (*as they come in*) : I'm no prisoner, am I ? Why should I stay up in my room if I don't want to ?

[*Her brother is steadying her arm ; on her other arm swings a silk bag, closed by a draw-string. Both* EBEN *and* STANHOPE *help in seating her, more feeble than in the morning. As soon as she is seated*

she clutches for the bag, holding it. ELSA *brings a footstool, which her aunt disregards.*

EBEN (*cheerfully*) : All right now ?

AGATHA : If it's the last day I'll ever be here, then I want to *be* here.

EBEN : That's right, Aunt Agatha, and here we all are.

AGATHA : But to-morrow. We won't be here to-morrow.

ELSA : Then let's think about our being here to-day.

[*She sits on the footstool.* EBEN *throws more papers on the fire from the heap on the floor.*

AGATHA : Yes. Make it burn. (*Turning a little to see*) Burn them. Burn them all. (*She clutches the bag. Abruptly*) What are they ?

EBEN : Oh, just old things we don't need any more.

AGATHA : Old things we don't need any more.

[STANHOPE, *who has been watching her, can bear it no longer, goes out.*

ELSA : You'll have your tea now, won't you, Aunt Agatha ?

AGATHA (*after a moment of not coming from her own thought*) : What ? No. No, I don't want it. (*She turns her head to the fire, taking the bag from her arm, holding it in her hands.*) Put on—old things we don't need any more.

[*After an anxious look at her,* EBEN *puts more papers on the fire.*

EBEN (*briskly*) : It's going to be fine for you up at father's. That's going to be the most comfortable room you ever had.

AGATHA : If Elsa hadn't run away and left her father I wouldn't be turned out.

ELSA : I'm sorry, Aunt Agatha.

AGATHA (*quite differently*) : Little Elsa.

[*With a low sob* ELSA *leans against her old aunt.* EBEN *goes softly out. So they sit a moment,* AGATHA'S *hand on* ELSA'S *hair. But from this she goes into a curious, fixed state.*

Where is Alison ?

ELSA : She isn't here. Though she seemed here, just a moment ago.

AGATHA (*trying to sit more erect*) : I have to take care of Alison.

ELSA : Yes. You always did.

AGATHA : I always did.

ELSA : Always ?

AGATHA : But she—went away. How could I tell —what she wanted me to do ?

[*Pause.*

Who is looking at us ?

ELSA : No one is looking at us. You and I are here alone.

AGATHA : You are Elsa ?

ELSA : I am Elsa.

[*With trembling fingers* AGATHA *undoes the string of her bag and takes out a small, leather portfolio. Looks fearfully around, looks at the fire. She tries to rise.*

ELSA : What is it, Aunt Agatha ? I will do anything you want done.

AGATHA : You will—do anything—I want done ?

ELSA : Why, yes, Aunt Agatha. I will do anything in the world for you.

AGATHA : Elsa will do it. Elsa.

ELSA : Yes. Elsa will do it.

AGATHA : Then——

[*She holds out the leather case, but withdraws it. Then suddenly gives it.*

Take it ! For—Elsa.

[*She falls forward.*

ELSA (*frightened*) : Aunt Agatha !

[*She leans her back in the chair, though not letting go the small portfolio* AGATHA *has given her. Becomes more frightened as she looks.*

Aunt Agatha ! What is it ? Speak to me !

[*After another moment of growing fear she runs to the door.*

Father ! Quick ! Eben !

[EBEN *hurries in.*

EBEN : What is it ?

[STANHOPE *enters.*

ELSA : She—has she fainted ?

STANHOPE (*bending over her*) : Agatha ! Agatha !

[*On the other side,* EBEN *takes one of her hands, he is feeling for her pulse.*

Agatha.

[EBEN *lays his head against her heart.*

EBEN (*looking up*) : Why, father, I don't——

[*Her eyes are closed.* STANHOPE *lifts one of the lids, looking at the eye.*

ELSA : Has she—fainted ?

STANHOPE : She has died.

[ELSA, *who has not let go the leather case, presses it, and her two hands, tight against her breast.*

EBEN : It is better.

STANHOPE (*who is kneeling by her*) : My sister ! Agatha ! Forgive me. (*Lifting his head, taking her two hands, looking into her face. Softly, as if putting her to sleep*) Yes. Yes. Find Alison dear. Find Alison.

CURTAIN

SCENE : *Alison's room. The door into the hall is rear, toward left ; centre, rear, a fireplace. Beyond this a smaller door, as if opening into dressing-room or closet. At right, extending from rear, a single, four-poster bed. It has a light, flowered counterpane. Right, front, a desk. There is a small stand near the head of the bed ; between the bed and fireplace, a low easy chair. In the rear corner, left, an old bureau. In the middle of the room, though somewhat front, and left, an old-fashioned walnut table.*

The curtains are white. The carpet is the colour of grey-green moss.

A fire is burning, and the room is lighted by a lamp on the stand near the bed.

It nears the last hour of the century, a little after half-past ten, evening of the same day.

The door opens slowly, and ELSA *comes in. She waits a moment by the door, as if to be asked to enter. Then goes to the fire, holding out her hands. She looks at the clock on the fireplace mantel. Winds, sets it, consulting her watch. Turns, standing uncertainly a moment. Goes slowly to the desk. Looks at a picture in a gold, oval frame, which hangs over the desk. She opens a drawer and takes out the portfolio her* AUNT AGATHA *gave her. Stands there holding it. She is about to sit at the desk, but steps back from it, as if it is not for her to sit there. Goes to the table ; putting the portfolio there, she goes to the mantel, where are two silver candlesticks. Lights candles, and takes them to the table. She sits down, and after holding the portfolio a moment, spreads it out as if to open the pockets (it is one of those flexible cases which double over). She is starting to open one side when there is a knock at the door.*

ELSA (*putting the portfolio on the table*) : Come in.

ANN : May I ? Just a moment ?

ELSA : Of course, Ann.

ANN (*looking around*) : Alison's room. As if—as if she might be going to bed here.

ELSA : I have been thinking of that.

[*Pause.*

Won't you sit down, dear ?

[ANN *comes to the table, sits.*

ANN : I feel I shouldn't be here. I know you are tired, and want to be alone in this room. I'll only stay a minute.

ELSA : I'm glad you came.

ANN (*impulsively, yet timidly*) : I was so glad to see you, Elsa, when you came.

ELSA (*grateful*) : You were ?

ANN : Oh, yes. So were Eben and Ted.

ELSA : But father——

ANN : He can't help it, can he ?

ELSA : No. Of course not. But—I did so want to come. (*Shaking her head*) It wasn't that I wanted to. I had to.

ANN : You had to be here once more.

ELSA : The last time.

ANN : It's hard.

ELSA : I used to come to this room when things went wrong. " Come to Alison, dear," she'd say. Or, " Whatever is wrong, Alison will make it right."

[*Pause.*

If only she could !

ANN : Perhaps she can.

ELSA : I fear not. I have gone—out of her world.

ANN : I'm not sure she would think so.

ELSA : Perhaps not. For, really, you couldn't go out of her world. She was everywhere. She knew.

ANN : I didn't know her but—it does seem that way. What did I say ? I didn't know her ? But I do know her. Her poems let me know her. And now, to-night, I know her better than before.

[ELSA *only waits in enquiry.*

Elsa ! Can you fall in love, all at once, with somebody you don't know ?

ELSA (*looking at the picture over the desk*) : Ask Alison.

ANN (*following her look*) : Is that—his picture ?

ELSA : Yes. It was always there . . . as long as I can remember.

ANN (*going to it*) : How strange the clothes look.

ELSA : Ours will look strange too, in thirty years.

ANN : Why, I suppose they will. They seem so right now.

ELSA : Nothing stays right—for ever.

ANN (*turning to her*) : Love does.

ELSA (*with a little laugh*) : Love doesn't have to clothe itself.

ANN (*coming back to her*) : Then you think it really can be love, though it happens—all at once ?

ELSA : It has happened too often for me to say it can't be true. Though it wasn't that way with me.

ANN : You and Bill had known each other a long time.

ELSA : Since I had braids down my back. And he never used to be—different from anyone else. And then, all of a sudden—— We had been dancing ; we stopped by the door. We just looked at each other—stared, rather, and he said, " Why, Elsa ! " We stood there, and then he said, " It is Elsa." And we went out to the

verandah, and everything was different, because he was Bill and I was Elsa.

ANN : So it did happen suddenly, after all.

ELSA : And everything we had together in the past—when we used to slide down hill together —was there, alive, giving us a past we hadn't known we were making for ourselves.

ANN : I think it is a miracle, don't you ?

ELSA : Yes, I think it is a miracle. Though it's a miracle you have to pay for, sometimes.

ANN : Always, perhaps.

ELSA : I don't know. Often it goes happily. It's nice that you don't have to hurt anyone.

ANN : But I do, I fear. He was almost engaged. Not quite. Elsa ! His name is Richard.

ELSA : Richard is a nice name.

ANN : I shall never call him Dick. Richard I think is better for him.

[ELSA *nods gravely.*

And to think it was Alison brought us together ! That is like a blessing, don't you think ?

ELSA : I do think so.

ANN : It was wonderful, down by the river, thinking of all that happened in this century that is going, of all that will happen in the century that is right here now, for us.

[*She is lost in this a moment.*

Perhaps it seems cruel we should be sitting here talking of love, with poor Miss Agatha dead just across the hall.

ELSA : It is the way it is.

ANN : And it is strange. She was so good ; but she does seem dead, and Alison, dead eighteen years, is here.

[ELSA's *hand moves, rests on the portfolio.*

Elsa, I came to ask you something, and I'm sorry it seems I came for a purpose—a favour ; because I stayed down here hoping to have a talk with you, but——

ELSA : What is it, dear ? I will do it, if I can.

ANN : You see, Richard has to think of—the story. In spite of—(*an excited little laugh*)—everything else, he has to think of the paper. And it's more of a story now, Alison's sister dying just as she is leaving the house where she and Alison lived together.

ELSA : Yes, I suppose it is more of a story.

ANN : And he needs a picture of Miss Agatha.

ELSA : You would have to ask father about that.

ANN : How can I ? He's with *her*.

ELSA : But, you see, I haven't—the right. Ask Eben.

ANN : Eben is so strange. He's down in the library, reading the books, and he doesn't look up when you come in, or hear you when you speak. So I thought, " I can't talk to the others, but I believe I could talk to Elsa." I always wanted to talk to you. I always had—sounds foolish—a sort of case on you. All the younger girls did. Elsa Stanhope, they'd say. As if you were what they wanted to be.

ELSA : Oh—Ann !

ANN : It seemed you had everything. Beautiful —a Stanhope—so nice to everyone, yet always holding yourself a little apart. We used to think of you as a princess.

ELSA (*after looking at her in silence a moment*) : And then I—went back on you, didn't I ?

ANN : To tell the truth, we didn't think so. The older people did, or thought they should. We thought you were brave.

ELSA : I wasn't brave. I was trapped. I didn't think it was right, but I couldn't help myself. And Bill. When you love, you want to give your man—everything in the world.

ANN : Everything.

ELSA : But in giving to him, I took so much away from him.

ANN (*for a moment not intruding on all* ELSA *is feeling*) : But you love each other—as much as ever.

ELSA : Our love is a flame—burning fiercely—in sorrow. (*Coming from this*) I wish I could say yes about the picture, Ann. There is one here.

[*She goes to the desk, takes a picture from the drawer.* ANN *goes to her, they look at it.*

ANN : Oh, it's a *dear*. She was much younger then.

ELSA : Taken years ago, before Alison died.

ANN : When she was Agatha, while Alison was Alison.

ELSA (*nodding*) : It never would have occurred to her to have one taken afterwards. She thought she was just for Alison.

ANN : She worshipped her.

ELSA : And guarded her, her whole life through. I'd really like to give it to you, for her own sake. Aunt Agatha, who lived always in this house, now wanted, for a moment, by the world. She was so good. And she will pass—so soon. I'd like to talk to your Richard, and tell him how good she was.

ANN : Oh, *would* you, Elsa ?

ELSA : But I haven't the right to speak for the family.

[*A knock.*

Come in.

[EBEN *enters.*

I thought you'd come, Eben.

EBEN (*with an emotional, rather reckless laugh*) : See the New Year in.

ANN (*softly*) : Will you ask him ?

ELSA : Eben, Ann wants this picture of Aunt Agatha, to give to her reporter.

EBEN : She's in love with him.

ELSA (*laughing*) : It certainly looks that way.

EBEN : Are you going to marry him, Ann ?

ANN : What else can I do ?

[*They all laugh a little.*

EBEN : And go away and leave father ?

ANN : What else can I do ?

EBEN : Poor father. We all want to go away and leave him.

ELSA : You won't, Eben.

EBEN : What else can I do—but stay ?

[*Pause.*

I don't know—about the picture. You'd have to ask father.

ANN : He's with his sister.

EBEN : And she too—went away and left him.

[*He holds out his hand for the picture.*

Remember her that way, Elsa ?

ELSA : I remember.

EBEN : And then she got old, and strange. Yes—yes, take it. Let her have—one moment of youth.

ANN : Oh, *thank* you, Eben. You know, I think you are right.

EBEN : Oh, yes, you would think so. Easy to

call it right, when it's what you want to do. Don't mind me, Ann. Just talking to myself.

ANN : I do thank you. And I do think you are right.

EBEN : Well, that's good.

ANN : Good night.

ELSA : Good night, Ann. Many happy New Years.

ANN : Thank you. And to you.

ELSA : Thank you.

[ANN *goes.*

EBEN : You've no idea how father will miss her. Seems a pretty sudden decision. You see, I don't *get* it. You are yourself for years and years, and then some other self you don't know at all is more to you than anything else. It's like building up something, only to throw it down.

ELSA : And then it all means something.

EBEN : Does it ? Poor father. It isn't only that Ann is so helpful to him, but he has a particular feeling about her. I wonder how long mother and father were happy together ?

ELSA : I don't remember them as happy.

EBEN : I suspect he gave up a lot. I almost know it—feel I shouldn't know. And what's he left with ? I don't see Ted comforting anyone's old age.

ELSA : But I think he may. He's so much like everyone else.

EBEN : Dreary picture of the world.

ELSA : Though you are father's greatest comfort, Eben.

EBEN : Then I can only say again—" Poor father."

ELSA : What's the matter, Eben ?

EBEN (*considering talking to her, putting it off*) :

It's a good thing you were here—when it happened. Father would have sent for you.

ELSA : Yes, I think he would want me to be here—now.

EBEN (*standing by the fire*) : The clock is going.

ELSA : I wanted it to tell—the last hour.

EBEN : As it told the hours for Alison. Don't you suppose they seemed pretty long at times ?

ELSA : Here—she should be sitting (*her hand on the chair by the fire.*)

EBEN : Unless—(*he goes over to the desk, puts his hand on that chair*)—here. (*Standing back, as if looking at her*) She is sitting here with her papers —with her thoughts, and the words for her thoughts. She is wearing a white dress. The full skirt spreads out from the chair. The sleeves too are full, and her small hands hover over what she has. Her eyes—— Heavens ! Have I forgotten them ?

ELSA : They are clear, like golden wine.

EBEN : Her brown hair is parted in the middle, and held loosely at the neck. She is looking straight ahead, as if into something. But she is really waiting for the right word to come. They came, you can tell that. They were willing visitors. She didn't have to go out and pull them in. There is a knock at the door. It's me. I am crying. She makes a funny little face. She says, " Tell Alison." I tell her Jimmy Miles has knocked over my mud house. She says, " You can build a fort, and put him in it." She tells me the story of the bumble-bee that got drunk on larkspur and set out to see how drunk you could get in heaven. And what became of her thoughts —the thought I interrupted ?

ELSA : Oh, it waited for her, and the bumble-bee came into it.

EBEN : And that was his heaven.

ELSA : Why not ?

[*They are both brighter.*

Then another knock. No, a pounding with fists—" Alison "—" Alison." Little Elsa ! Aunt Agatha won't give me a cookie, because I pulled the cat's tail. She tells me Aunt Agatha can't help being like that, and that the cat would agree with her. And she says, what if I had pulled the tail off, and we laugh ; and she writes me a little poem, about a cookie that had no tail. She gives me candy, and stands at the door so Aunt Agatha can't get in ; but God, she says, could come down the chimney.

[*They both laugh.* ELSA *goes over to the table, takes up the portfolio she was about to open when* ANN *came in.*

(*Slowly*) I don't know what is in this.

EBEN : Where did you get it ?

[*A knock at the door.*

Come in.

[STANHOPE *opens the door. Stands there a moment before closing it. Continues to stand near the door.*

STANHOPE (*as if to himself*) : I wish I could talk with Alison.

EBEN : Come into her room, father. Do sit down. You look tired out.

[STANHOPE *sits in the chair near the fire ;* EBEN *sits by the desk,* ELSA *at the table. A long pause.*

STANHOPE : The funeral must be down here.

EBEN : Yes. I think so too.

STANHOPE : It means a good deal of work, for everyone, but I won't take her out of her house. Not into another—house.

EBEN : Things can be straightened around enough—for that.

STANHOPE : How badly we did it.

EBEN : We did the best we could.

STANHOPE : Poor consolation. (*After a moment he turns directly to* ELSA) You were alone with your aunt when she died.

ELSA : Yes, father.

STANHOPE : What did she say ?

ELSA : The last thing ?

STANHOPE : Yes.

ELSA : She said, " For Elsa."

STANHOPE : What did she mean ?

ELSA : I don't know—yet.

STANHOPE : You were holding a little leather case that Alison used.

ELSA : Yes.

STANHOPE : Where did you get it ?

ELSA : Aunt Agatha gave it to me.

STANHOPE : And it was then she said——

ELSA : " For Elsa."

STANHOPE : What is in it ?

ELSA : I don't know yet.

STANHOPE : Open it and see.

[ELSA *hesitates, looks to* EBEN.

EBEN : But it's Elsa's, isn't it, father, if Aunt Agatha gave it to her ?

STANHOPE : It is the family's. Agatha didn't know what she was doing. Where is it ?

[ELSA *takes it from the table.*

Open it.

[*There is a knock at the door.*

ELSA (*after waiting for one of the others to speak*) : Come.

[JENNIE *enters.*

JENNIE (*who seems confused at seeing the two men*) : Oh, I thought it was just Miss Elsa.

[*Stands uncertainly, troubled.*

ELSA : What is it, Jennie ?

JENNIE : Never mind—now.

[*But stands there.*

EBEN : Did you want something ?

JENNIE : Yes.

EBEN : Well, what ?

JENNIE : She told me to.

STANHOPE : Who ?

JENNIE : Her. Miss Agatha.

EBEN : Told you what ?

[JENNIE *goes to the desk, starts to open a drawer, turns to* STANHOPE.

JENNIE : Excuse me, but I gave my promise. (*Looks.*) It's gone ! Where is it ?

STANHOPE : Where is what, Jennie ?

JENNIE : Give it to me ! I gave my promise.

EBEN : You'll have to tell us a little more, Jennie. We don't know what you are talking about.

JENNIE : All these last days—after she got the idea—and couldn't—it was always the same—" Make the fire, Jennie. Put on more wood—make it burn "—and she'd sit by it—and couldn't.

STANHOPE : Couldn't *what* ?

JENNIE : Do it herself. So she'd tell me—and each time I'd promise.

EBEN : What did you promise, Jennie ?

JENNIE (*a little impatiently*) : To do it for her, if she died before—— Where *is* it ? It isn't here—(*looking again in the drawer, then in the pigeon holes*) —or here.

[STANHOPE, *rising, takes the portfolio from* ELSA, *who almost resists, and rises.*

ELSA : No ! It is mine !

STANHOPE (*to* JENNIE) : Is this what you are looking for ?

JENNIE : That's it ! Oh, give it to me ! Please give it to me—so's I can carry out my promise. I could never draw another easy breath if——

STANHOPE : What did Miss Agatha say about it ?

JENNIE : Nothing. Only she'd try—and couldn't —get it—then bring it back here. Give it to me —so that I can carry out my promise !

EBEN : Just what did you promise, Jennie ?

STANHOPE (*as* JENNIE *does not reply*) : Answer, please. What did you promise ?

JENNIE : I promised—to burn it.

ELSA (*low*) : Oh, no !

STANHOPE : My sister must have changed her mind. She gave this to Miss Elsa.

JENNIE : Then she wanted *you* to——

STANHOPE : Is that it ? Did she ask you to burn it ?

ELSA (*shaking her head*) : She held it out to me—started to take it back—then gave it—said, " For Elsa," and died.

EBEN : That certainly makes it Elsa's.

JENNIE : I was to do it, the very night she—couldn't. I won't sleep a wink to-night unless—

STANHOPE : Yes, you will sleep, Jennie. This is a family matter. You may rest assured I will see that the right thing is done.

JENNIE (*after standing there helplessly*) : Well, I can't help it, can I ?

STANHOPE : No, it is out of your hands now.

EBEN : It's after half-past ten, Jennie. Better get some rest. You'll have a hard day to-morrow.

JENNIE (*looking from him to his father*) : I looked after her—thirty years. And I did for Miss Alison, when we had Miss Alison. What am I going to do—now ?

STANHOPE : Of course you know we will always look after you, Jennie.

JENNIE : But who—who will I look after ?

STANHOPE : Oh, you'll have to look after me.

JENNIE : You have so many.

STANHOPE : Have I ?

JENNIE (*moving to the door*) : Well—— (*Turning back*) That was why she tried to burn the house —burn it all together, because she couldn't burn it alone. You can tell by that—how much she wanted to do it.

EBEN : And how impossible it was to do it.

JENNIE : But I could do it. I wouldn't even look at it. I promised not to. I would put it in the kitchen stove, put down the lid, and wait. Then I was to stir the ashes, to make sure.

STANHOPE : Good night, Jennie. I promise you again, the right thing will be done.

JENNIE : Good night.

EBEN : Good night, Jennie.

[*She goes.*

Poor old thing. Remember all the good things she used to make for us, Elsa ?

ELSA : Cookies with nuts in them.

EBEN : Doughnuts sprinkled with sugar. (*Looking at his father, who has returned to his chair, spread the portfolio on his lap, and is about to open it*) If you will forgive me, father, you're awfully tired now ; I think you would feel better about it—afterwards, to let Elsa open the package Aunt

Agatha gave her and see whether it is for all of us.

[STANHOPE, *after considering, holds the portfolio out to* ELSA.

ELSA (*taking it*) : Thank you, father.

[*She sits at the table.*

(*Uncertainly, to* EBEN) Shall I open it now?

EBEN : If you will. Why not?

[ELSA *puts the case on the table, spreads it out.*

ELSA (*nervously, to* EBEN) : Perhaps you had better do it.

EBEN : No, open it.

[*She unfastens one side, takes out a slender package of old papers, tied with a thread.*

EBEN : Why, that's like——

ELSA (*feeling it*) : It's the paper Alison used for —for her—— (*taking out others*) All tied—that same way.

EBEN : The way *she* tied them. (*After a pause*) Undo one of them.

[ELSA *tries to untie the knot, has trouble with it.*

STANHOPE : Break that thread!

[ELSA *does so, and unfolds a long sheet of old paper.*

EBEN : Alison's writing!

STANHOPE (*sharply*) : What are they?

ELSA (*reading*) : Why—they are—they are——

EBEN (*reading over her shoulder*) : Are they—*poems*?

[*He takes one from another package, then opens still another.*

(*As if he cannot believe it*) All of them.

[*He takes a package to his father.*

They are Alison's. They are poems. Poems we never saw.

[STANHOPE *examines one.*

They are her poems, aren't they?

STANHOPE (*slowly*) : No one else—that ever lived—would say it just that way.

EBEN : But, father—had you known about them?

STANHOPE : I did not know they existed.

EBEN : But *why*? (*Showing one he is himself reading*) See? She never wrote a thing—more Alison.

STANHOPE (*reading it*) : Alison—at her best.

EBEN : Then I just can't understand it! Where have they been? *Why?* My *God*—was it *this* Aunt Agatha thought she must burn?

STANHOPE : I don't understand it.

ELSA (*who has been reading*) : O-h, I think I do.

EBEN (*starting to speak to her, but as she is deeply absorbed, turning again to his father*) : But, father, this is of immense importance! Look at them! Why, I believe it's almost as many as we published! Coming now, when she has her place—the truest poet America has produced—you know all they say—now—so much later—all of these—— But *why*?

ELSA : *Alison!*

[*Her head goes down among the papers. The two men look at her.*

There is a tap at the door. TED *comes in, wearing outdoor things. At the interruption,* ELSA *raises her head, and while he is there goes on reading.*

TED (*going to his father*) : I'm sorry, father. Know how you feel. I'm—— (*Feels awkward.*) Gee, I had an awful time getting here. Awfully sorry not to have been here before. You see, I was at the Martins', and they didn't know that, so I

didn't get the word till I got to the dance. (*Turning to* EBEN, *as his father does not seem to hear him*) May thought her father would bring me down in his automobile. Well, Mr. McMasters didn't want to take it out at night, bad roads and all, finally said he would— 'count of—of what it was. Well, the thing broke down, of course. Guess they aren't much good, if you really want to get anywhere. Had to go to the Szwartz' and borrow a bike. Bum bike, thought I was never going to get here.

EBEN (*still dazed*) : That's all right. Glad you got here.

TED : Must have happened just after I left.

EBEN : Yes. At four fifteen.

TED : Louise 'll be down first thing in the morning. She's awfully sorry she can't be here tonight.

EBEN : It's just as—— That's all right.

TED (*looking at his father*) : Well, gee, I'm—— (*Looking from one to the other*) Course I know how you all feel.

[*As no one speaks he stoops to pick up a paper* ELSA *has brushed to the floor.*

That's Alison's writing. (*Reading*) It's a poem. Guess I don't know that one. (*Looking up at* EBEN) Why I thought the manuscripts were all at the State Historical Society.

[*Putting it on the table, he takes up another.*

Don't seem to remember this one, either. (*Turning over others*) Say ! Where did these come from ?

EBEN : We have just found them.

TED : *Found* them ? Where were they ?

EBEN : Aunt Agatha had them.

TED : And never—— For—Pete's—sake. (*Suddenly excited*) Why, say, that's important, isn't it ?

EBEN (*nodding, speaking low*) : Father's pretty—

done up by this, after—everything else. Just leave him here with us now. You can look at those to-morrow.

TED (*looking at his father*) : Well—all right. (*Going reluctantly to the door*) But, *gee*, what did Aunt Agatha want to hide them for ?

EBEN : We don't know. She must have thought it was the right thing to do.

TED : Don't see how she figured *that* out.

EBEN : We can talk about it to-morrow. (*As* TED *is closing the door*) Don't say anything about it !

STANHOPE (*looking up*) : No !

TED : Gee !

[*He goes.*

EBEN (*regarding his father*) : Don't you think we'd better put them away for to-night ! They're too important for—now. Hadn't you better get to bed, father ?

STANHOPE (*to* ELSA) : Why did you say her name like that ?

ELSA : Because she was telling me her story. It's here—the story she never told. She has written it, as it was never written before. The love that never died, the loneliness, anguish, and beauty of her love ! I said her name because I was looking into her heart.

[STANHOPE *holds out his hand.*

EBEN : Not to-night.

[*But as* STANHOPE *continues to hold out his hand,* EBEN *gives him the poems* ELSA *had been reading. He and* ELSA *sit by the table, bending over others.*

EBEN (*low, and in beautiful excitement*) Why that bird sang—thirty years ago—and sings now.

ELSA : But *her—her.*

EBEN : But the way she kept it all in life. I can see that flower bend, and smell it.

STANHOPE (*simply*) : I cannot bear it.

EBEN (*going to him and trying to take the poems*) : Don't read them to-night, father.

[*But* STANHOPE *keeps them, and takes up another.*

EBEN *goes back to the table.*

ELSA (*speaking to what she reads*) : Yes. *I* know.

[*The clock strikes eleven. A dimming of the lights indicates the passing of time. A moment's darkness. When the lights rise,* ELSA *still sits at the table, as if she has had a great experience, as if she has come to know something, and has the courage to know it.* EBEN *has moved, and is standing by the fire.* STANHOPE *sits as he was, bowed over the papers still in his lap. After a moment the clock strikes the half hour.*

EBEN (*slowly, as if trying to realise it*) : And all of that—went on in this room.

STANHOPE : If I had known it was—as much as this—I would not have asked her to stay.

ELSA : You did ask her to stay ?

STANHOPE : In this room I asked her to stay. He was below. He had come for her.

EBEN : I never really knew the story.

STANHOPE : She had gone East, with father, to Cambridge ; thirtieth reunion of father's class. She met him there. He was a teacher of English, at Harvard. At once they seemed to recognise each other. He was for her. She was for him. That was—without question. But he was married. He had children. They parted. But—they were one. I know that now.

EBEN : And it was after that—all those years after that—she played with us, Elsa, loved her flowers, comforted us and gave us the little presents.

ELSA : It was death for her. But she made it—life eternal.

EBEN (*so moved, it is hard to speak*) : Never mind, Alison. We have found you.

ELSA : You will never be alone again.

[*A knock,* TED *comes in.*

TED : I want to read some of the poems. (*As no one speaks*) Well, gee, I'm of the family too, ain't I ? If you don't want me here I'll take some of them down to the library.

STANHOPE : They will not be taken from this room.

TED : All right, then I'll read them here.

EBEN : Not now.

TED : They're mine as much as yours, aren't they ?

STANHOPE : I will protect my sister. I will do—what Agatha could not do.

EBEN (*sharply*) : What do you mean ?

STANHOPE : They were for her alone. She does not have to show her heart to the world.

ELSA : Father ! You don't mean—— Tell us you don't mean—— !

STANHOPE : I mean that I am going to burn them in her own fireplace—before her century goes.

EBEN : Father !

ELSA (*gathering up the papers*) : No !

TED : And *I* say—no ! They're ours too, aren't they ?

STANHOPE : I shall protect my sister, if it's the last thing I do on earth.

EBEN : She isn't just your sister, father.

TED : I should say not ! She's Alison.

STANHOPE : And she could help get you through

Harvard, couldn't she? What luck! Send a wire to your teacher! Get your grade!

EBEN: Steady now, father. There's been too much to-day. No decisions can be made to-night.

STANHOPE: If they're not made to-night, they will never be made.

[*He rises.*

TED: Now here I object. Here *I* step in. *I'll* protect Alison. I'm younger than you are. I can do it better.

EBEN: Leave it to us, Ted.

TED: I'll not leave it to anybody! I am Alison Stanhope's nephew, and I will not have her poems burned. Understand?

STANHOPE: Leave the room!

TED: Oh, no, father, you can't go on doing that. I'll be alive when the rest of you are dead. Then *I'm* the one to look after them.

[*With a swift movement he puts some of the papers in his pocket, reaches for others.*

STANHOPE (*springing at him*): Drop them! Drop them or I'll kill you!

EBEN: *Father!*

[STANHOPE, *overcome by what he has said, takes a step back.* EBEN *comes between him and* TED.

EBEN: I agree with you. I want what you want. The poems must be kept. But the way you go at it would make anybody want to knock you down.

TED: All right. Knock me down. Try it.

EBEN: Shut up. Use some judgment. Can't you see father's worn out?

TED: I'm not.

ELSA: Oh, Ted! *Please.* Here in Alison's room,

Aunt Agatha dead across the hall, must we *quarrel* ?

EBEN : Go away, Ted. Elsa and I will talk to father. You have no *sense.*

TED : I've sense enough to know the value of things.

STANHOPE : They're almost as valuable as rubber tires, aren't they ?

ELSA : Please go away now. We promise you it will be all right.

STANHOPE : I promise you my sister's intimate papers are not going into your vulgar world.

[TED *snatches for more of them.* EBEN *seizes him.*

EBEN : I'm a match for you yet. Don't be so damned sure you'll be alive when I am dead ! And what if you are ? You're alive now, and what of it ? What do you amount to ?

TED : I'll show you what I amount to !

[*He tries to break from* EBEN's *grip.* ELSA *comes behind them, a hand on each shoulder.*

ELSA (*quietly*) : Oh, this isn't the way we act in our family.

[EBEN *steps back.*

Come, Ted dear. I ask you to go. And leave them to me. I know their value—as no one else knows.

TED (*looking hard at her*) : All right, Elsa. I trust them to you. Not Eben. Not father. I leave them with Elsa.

[*He goes.*

STANHOPE : He has some of them.

EBEN : It's all right, father. Ted is really all right.

[*With a groan,* STANHOPE *sinks to his chair, burying his face in his hands.*

EBEN (*looking anxiously at him*) : Let's have a little sherry—for the New Year.

[*He goes.*

ELSA (*after he has raised his head*) : Ted's exasperating, but of course you didn't mean it, father. You couldn't mean it. It's Alison's heart. You wouldn't keep that from—living in the world she loved.

STANHOPE : Living in *your* world ? Linked with —*you* ? As if——

ELSA : Don't say it, father. She wouldn't. She would understand. Alison knew. And, do you know, I think she would be glad ?

STANHOPE : Glad you ran away with a married man, living in shame and leaving misery behind you ?

ELSA : Glad I have my love. Despite—all the rest. Knowing what it is to be alone. I think she would be glad I am not alone. What could I do—alone ? How could I, Elsa, find victory in defeat? For, you see, I am not enough. She would know that. She would be tolerant. She would be gentle—oh, so gentle. If she were here now, in her own room, she would say, " Happy ? Are you happy ? Be happy, little Elsa," she would say.

[EBEN *returns with the tray of bottle and glasses.*

EBEN (*pouring the drinks, trying to speak naturally*) : Well, it's a trial, having Ted in the family. It's a chore. Though, do you know—rather I liked him. (*Giving his father the glass*) Keep in mind, father, how Alison loved the kids of the family.

ELSA (*holding her drink before the candle*) : That was the colour of her eyes.

EBEN (*raising his glass*) : To Alison's love of youth !

ELSA (*as if speaking to her*) : Alison.

STANHOPE : To my sister, who loved to the utmost, and denied, because it was right.

[*After drinking a little,* EBEN *begins arranging the papers, which are in confusion.*

STANHOPE : Gather them up. Put them as they were.

[ELSA *helps him.*

EBEN (*who has paused to read, and smiles at something he sees*) : No question about it. They are too big for just us. They are for the world.

STANHOPE : In justification of myself—I am so tired of justifying myself that I wish—I wish I were with Agatha—but I ask you, did she give them to the world ?

EBEN : She didn't give the others to the world, either. She was too timid of the world. She just left them, and we did the right thing, as in her heart she knew we would.

STANHOPE : These were not left with the others. Where were they left ? What did she tell Agatha?

EBEN : We don't know their story, and now we won't know it, for Aunt Agatha can't tell us. But we know they are here, alive, and we know we will do the right thing.

STANHOPE : Yes. We will do the right thing.

[*He goes to the fire, stirs it. There is a knock.* ANN *comes in, followed by* TED *and* KNOWLES.

ANN : I'm sorry to come in here now. But I couldn't help it.

[STANHOPE, *as if unable to bear the thought there is more to meet, sinks to his chair.*

KNOWLES : And I'm sorry. You've been so good to me, and I've been such a nuisance on a hard day. But when I realised I was the only one from the outside who knew, I—I had to come. It was my duty, sir.

EBEN (*to* TED) : So you told.

TED : You think you can keep them to yourself. Ask *anybody. Anybody.*

ANN (*going to* STANHOPE, *and sitting in a low seat beside him*) : You were so good to me, always. I feel as if you were my father, though I know you're not, really. You were so good to mother. (*Low*) You loved her. And she loved you. Through years. And you denied your love, because of me, and Eben, and Elsa, and Ted. Well, here we all are, the children—Eben, Elsa, Ted, and Ann. Can't you let us, now when you are old, and sad, tell you what to do—for us ? Listen ! Don't you hear mother ? Won't you let her—tell you what to do ? Mother loved too. Why, you must know I knew of it. Mother is dead. And she couldn't write—couldn't leave it —for all of us, who are going on loving. But won't you let it pass on, as a gift to all love—let it *be* here—when you are not here ?

STANHOPE : Ann ! Don't !

ANN : I must. It is too important. I know that now. I know to-night, better than I would have known last night.

STANHOPE (*his hands falling at his sides*) : I cannot make it plain to you, but she was of an age when people did not tell their love. She held it deep in her heart. Then, can I let her tell it now, to serve you ?

ANN : Yes.

STANHOPE (*turning his face away*) : I cannot bear—your youth.

ANN : Will you promise me to leave it to Elsa ?

STANHOPE : Elsa ! Why should I leave it to Elsa ?

ANN : To a woman. Because Alison said it—for women.

STANHOPE : Alison was not like Elsa. Alison stayed.

ANN : Then let her speak for Elsa, and mother, and me. Let her have *that* from it, for her own sake—let her have that from it !

EBEN : Yes. I think father will leave it to Elsa. And now, the rest of you, please go.

ANN (*making a move to go, but turning back*) : I don't want you to do it, because I have a great love for you, and I don't want you, when dying, to feel, " I am guilty, I took life."

[*She goes out*, TED *starts after her, but as* KNOWLES *steps forward* TED *stands in the doorway.*

KNOWLES (*very simply, but as if the words have a great mission*) :

" She lays her beams in music,
In music every one,
To the cadence of the whirling world
Which dances round the sun.

That so they shall not be displaced
By lapses or by wars,
But for the love of happy souls
Outlive the newest stars."

[*Stands silent, motionless a moment ; goes.*

EBEN (*after a little time*) : Enough for one night, isn't it ? One thing we know. Aunt Agatha left the poems to Elsa. For the time being, then, they are with Elsa. After—after the funeral, we can decide just what to do.

[*Pause.*

Good night, father.

[*No reply.*

Good night, Elsa.

ELSA : Eben ! Don't leave me.

EBEN (*with a nod, as to say, " It is better "*) : Yes.

[*He goes.*

ELSA (*after a pause, low*) : I didn't know, father, that you had gone through it too.

STANHOPE : Did you think I was happy with your mother ?

ELSA : No.

STANHOPE : And why did I stay ? For you, and your brothers. Mostly, for you.

ELSA : And then I——

STANHOPE : Then you—made it all nothing.

ELSA : I must seem—all wrong to you, father.

STANHOPE : You are wrong. You did not think of others, and that is wrong. And don't you know what this would say ? It would say, " They are like that. They were always like that." Louise is right there.

ELSA : Oh, father—Louise ! Our little town ! Is that the thing to think of—when Alison has spoken ?

STANHOPE : Our little town is our lives. It's Eben's children.

ELSA : And what will be wrong with Eben's children, that they can't love, and understand ? You do. Eben does. Have faith, father. Trust them to understand.

STANHOPE (*as a cry from deep*) : Oh, Elsa ! Why did you go away, and besmirch the name Alison held high ?

[*A sound from* ELSA, *a sobbing under her breath.*

And now, because of you——

ELSA : Don't, father. Don't say it. She wouldn't. You ought to hurt me—some. But don't be that cruel, to make me feel—because of me—she can't go on. I loved, father. I loved so much that——

STANHOPE : It is possible to love so much you can live without your love.

ELSA : I suppose it is possible, if you are a very great soul, or have a very stern sense of duty. But do you know, father, I feel Alison wrote those poems for me.

STANHOPE : I feel she wrote them for me.

ELSA : And there will be those in the future to say, " She wrote them for me."

STANHOPE : I feel—something right, something that all the time had to be, in you and me, here alone in her room, giving back to her century what she felt and did not say.

ELSA : But she did say.

STANHOPE : For herself alone.

ELSA : How can you know that ? And even so —what has been brought into life cannot be taken from life.

[STANHOPE *goes to the fire, puts on more wood.*

STANHOPE : I never thought you and I would do another thing together. But she did love you. Then shield her. Join with me. What went on in this room—let it end in this room. It is right.

[*He goes to the table and takes the portfolio.*

ELSA (*standing between him and the fire*) : Father ! The birds that sang thirty years ago (*her hands go out, as birds*). The flower that bent in the wind (*she bends, as in the wind*).

[*The clock gives the first stroke of twelve. He stands motionless, listening.*

ELSA (*choked with tears*) : Happy New Year, father.

STANHOPE (*mechanically*) : Happy——

[*From a distance are bells in the village, whistles, a few shots. He looks around the room, hearing the bells. He looks long at* ELSA.

It isn't—what you said. Or even what Ann said. But her. It goes. It is going. It is gone. She loved to make our little gifts. If she can make one more, from her century to yours, then she isn't gone. Anything else is—too lonely.

[*He holds the poems out to her.*

For Elsa—from Alison.

ELSA (*taking them*) : Father ! My father !

STANHOPE (*his arms around her*) : Little Elsa.

[*He holds her close while distant bells ring in the century.*

CURTAIN

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